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PROSE PASTORALS

PROSE PASTORALS

BY

HERBERT MILTON SYLVESTER

"He who knows what sweets and virtues are in the ground, the waters, the plants, the heavens, and how to come at these enchantments, is the rich and royal man."

EMERSON, *Nature.*

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PREFACE.

NO apology is offered for writing these Pastorals, or for putting them before the public in their present form. When they were written the author had no thought of making a book. What they may be to others he does not know, but to himself they are homely transcripts from Nature's pages, gathered here and there, as commonplace as much that goes to make up Nature's every-day moods.

The title to a book is like a door-plate: it tells who may be found within, and nothing more. To know the dwellers well, one must step inside, — must eat of their salt and drink of their "pottle" more than once. The author can only invite his

readers in to sup at a commonplace table, in hope of a better acquaintance in days to come. So the title for this volume is hardly more than the pitch-note of a song the reader is to sing for himself, setting its words to the never-to-be-forgotten tunes stolen from the Thrushes, the Bobolinks, and Robins that still haunt the once familiar meadows and orchards of a happy childhood.

THE AUTHOR.

QUINCY, JUNE 1, 1887.

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IN THE FIRELIGHT.

"Let a man but speak forth with genuine earnestness the thought, the emotion, the actual condition of his own heart; and other men, so strangely are we all knit together by the tie of sympathy, must and will give heed to him."

CARLYLE, *Essay on Burns.*

IN THE FIRELIGHT.

I.

SILENT I sit beside my glowing hearth;
Without, the bare limbs sway against the sky;
Weird, creaking sounds come up along the path,
Like elfin laughter-song, now low, now high;
And as the dull red light begins to wane
Above the dark line of the wood, —
The sober, half-regretful mood
Of a November day, —
The air is thick with white-winged messengers
That softly tap against my window-pane
Their winter reveille.

II.

The blazing fire-log snaps and roars in glee;
The sparks gleam brightly as the shadows fall,
And in the ruddy, fitful glow I see
Dark shapes go dancing up and down the wall.
Across the murky flue above the crane
Red-coated troops speed to the fray,
And wavering halt and fade away
To come again, —
As hopes, once brilliant, rush on to their goal,
To turn to dust and ashes for the pain
They bore in vain.

III.

The storm-winds moan their misery and loss
With gusty, gasping speech, then die away;
Above the sleepy eaves the great elms toss
Their naked, brawny arms in sheer dismay;
While through the crannies of the casement near,
With stealthy, noiseless presence creep
The phantoms of the snow to keep
Me ghostly company;
But like unbidden guests they turn and stop,
Uncertain, hesitating still, and peer
At my discourtesy.

IV.

The storm has lulled; the broad hearth's ruddy blaze
Has waned; across the hallway by the stair
A quaint old timepiece of Colonial days
With loud yet laggard tick doles out the spare
And fleeting moments of the weary year,
And keeps the grotesque brazen dogs—
Within whose warm embrace Yule-logs
In far-off days have burned—
An ancient fellowship, whose memories
Have grown with time and silence doubly dear
That centuries have earned.

V.

My fire burns low; tne live coals flush and pale;
I shut my eyes, and the dull snapping seems
A low sweet crooning-song, an olden tale
To bring swift thoughts of boyhood's happy dreams.
The years fly backward, — backward O so far!
It seems but yesterday when Spring
Brought all her fragrant blossoming
And promise rare,
On winds that tinged her cheeks with clover-tints,
With only fitful April tears to mar
A face so sweet and fair.

VI.

Within the shadows of the orchard-trees
That flank the low-gaped wall beyond the lane
I hear the plover whistling down the breeze,
The robins singing in the summer rain;
The throstle in the lowlands pipes his notes
Where brooks with azure quivers hold
The sun's slant javelins of gold,
Half-hid in meadow bloom,
That, tossed by summer winds, seems a bright sea
Of emerald flecked with flowery boats
Deep-laden with perfume.

VII.

In through the windows of the gable old,
Looking the misty road the river takes,
The rounding moon pours floods of pale-hued gold,
And with a quiet, dreamy splendor breaks
The raftered gloom; or on the roof's broad slope
With drowsy cadence once again
The low sweet music of the rain
Lulls me to childish rest;
And in the morning sun I trudge to school,
Nor dream there is a world of fairer hope
Beyond the breezy west.

VIII.

In alder-shadowed nooks with patient hand
I tempt the wary trout, or slowly take
The hillocked pastures, where the cattle stand
Knee-deep in quiet painted pools, that make
The sky's bright picture, for my homeward way.
Old faces greet me at the door,
And footsteps sound along the floor
So silent now and lone, —
The smouldering brands fall outward at my feet;
My youth was but a dream to fade away, —
A dream once all my own!

IX.

With face against the frosty pane, I see
Above the city's stately dome of white
God's footsteps in the starry mystery, —
The far-off lustrous prophecy of night, —
What joy or sorrow do they hold apart?
My loss may prove my neighbor's gain;
His wealth bring me its hoard of pain
Without the thought;
And yet, I have the lasting recompense
Of happy bygone days within my heart
With blessed memories fraught.

OUTLOOKS.

Life finds its meaning in its scope,
As broad or narrow as its aim,—
A poor, frail jest, if only hope
Or untaught hand may feed its flame.
Dame Nature's school keeps open door,—
Her novice needs no less, no more,—
Where long apprenticeship of thought is gain
Of stouter brawn and larger thrift of brain.

OUTLOOKS.

NOT long ago I made a visit to an exhibition of the Boston Art Club, and being early in the day the crowd of art-lovers had not made their appearance. One picture by a well-known artist attracted my attention. Designated in the Catalogue as "Indian Summer," it had all the wondrous spell of tree and stream, of stilly haunt, of laughing waters all aglow with amber tints of beech and scarlet flame of maples. The delicate film of autumn haze and arrowy shaft of golden sunlight were faithfully and tenderly reproduced. The superb wealth of drowsy warmth, of softened outline, of royal coloring were here, not harsh and over-strong, but deftly drawn with brush and knife. The quiet pool in the foreground, translucent as crystal, was strewn with hints of color as if it were the palette of the Supreme Artist. The dim, soundless woods were Nature's own cloisters, where only the footfall of slow-dropping twig and leaf broke the mysterious silences. No doubt the hillslopes which must lie just beyond the boundary of woods with their newly-ploughed lands were

populated with noisy congregations of crows whose loud halloos greet the farmer in derision, while troops of thieving jays pipe in shrilly notes across the wind-blown cornfields the preludes of the coming snows. The picture is a symphony of color and sentiment. I scan the technique from a close standpoint, I step backward to get a better and different view; others do the same. And so it is with the work that men do, whether with brush or pen, with hand or brain, the search is ever for that which most appeals to our sympathies and desires. With men as with pictures, I find in them the same reproductions of Nature, the same divinities approximately as we expect in the Creator after whose ideals they were fashioned. There are no needs among men which may not be readily supplied. The material is so abundant and lies so closely beside our thresholds that we overlook it in our wild search elsewhere, until some plodder comes along and silently takes the treasure to himself, to afterwards dole it out to his neighbors with usury.

It is one of the strange things in the lives of men that they find no value or charm in that which comes to them without some sort of sacrifice. The wild-flower which strews the wayside with bright color and makes the air sweet with delicate perfume, — delighting the eye with its wonderful variety of common violet, shy nodding wind-flower,

or broad patches of diminutive bluet (*Houstonia cærulea*), that like bits of soft blue sky seem to have wandered down to earth to revel amid the springing grasses of field and roadside, of waxen-petalled leatherleaf, the cinquefoil and spiderwort of the pasture-ledges, the orchids, mallows of the lower lands, — has no charm for those who would go into ecstasies over the bizarre beauties of the hot-house. Nature is the superior model. Cultivation spoils the natural flower. Take its prototype in humankind, over-breeding makes a superior, in some respects, species at the expense of commoner but more needful qualities. The bees that gather the sweets of the clover-field teach every-day lessons which men would do well to heed. The real good in life is in its naturalness. The plain homeliness of the old farm-house back among the hills bespeaks real comfort, and the plain, homely man who stops his team in the furrow to give you a hearty shake of the hand, that, barometer-like, shows the wealth of prospective hospitality, takes Nature for his teacher. Earth is the banker upon whom all his drafts of toil are drawn. She is alike his inspiration and his pleasure. None are nearer Nature than himself: she is his work-table and playground alike. The clouds, the winds, the rains and snow tell him when to haste and when he may loiter. He is barely ever a poet, and even if he is, he is unaware of it; but he loves Nature for what she affords

him of suggestion. He takes you to the highest pinnacle of his farm and shows you his broad acres, and all the while his eye glistens and his heart heaves with honest pride. He has wrought all this, for he tells you of a time when these smooth roods of land were covered with dense growths of wood and timber; but that was years ago. He takes you to his timber lands and pats the stout trunks of pine and spruce affectionately as he tells you how many thousand feet of clear lumber this or that tree will cut or scale. It is his compensation, his meed of success, the outcome of many a plan, of watchfulness, and of years of unremitting labor. His heart is as large as the outlook from his narrow porch-doorway, and within which is framed a magnificent picture of real sky and clouds. It is his poem by day and his dream by night, this farm of his, but when he looks out at morn or night it is only to scan the horizon as if to read the signs of wet or dry for the coming day, if of warm days when the seed should be brushed into the ground, brown and mellow from the plough, or if, of a "spell of hard weather," of clear skies when it were safe to cut the ripening grain.

Labor is the normal condition of living, and for the worker there is but little actual poetry. Its dreams lie mostly within the realms of sleep, and yet the bread of Industry is sweeter than any confection which Idleness ever rolled under its tongue.

The toot of the old tin dinner-horn that sends its echoes flying across lots, to the æsthetic ear would sound harsh and unmusical, but the bluff ploughman catches the homely note as it comes down the freshening wind, and he grows a span taller, the dull oxen prick up their ears and hasten on to the furrow's end, and with the perfection of instinct, unloosed from the plough or cart, start over the hill for the barn while their driver hastens after. I have great respect for the young man who holds his ambition for city life well under control. Life in town may open up a broader sphere of action, but it as well has its drawbacks. Men do not find themselves so independent where they can so easily lose their identity, as in the larger metropolitan cities where the subordinate positions are so numerous and so rapidly filled, but if he does come he is like to bring the romance of the country with him.

To forget the fields and orchard bloom in which the old homestead is cradled is to forget one's paternity, but the disposition is to break away from what seem the coarser ruts of labor, to try the outer world with its bracing atmosphere of marts and factories, its schools and colleges, and from whence come the scholars, the scientists, and the discoverers, who are to pilot the way in thought and development of coming days. The lowness of a man's aim is not always to be censured if he hits

the mark, if he makes the most of the material at hand. A man's work is always a hint to something better. The boy spurns the calloused hand of the artisan, the farmer, or the wood-chopper, and prefers the dissecting-room or the law office; not because he has not the due respect for work, for Muscle, but he believes in Brain. Instinct tells him that the province of thought is never spanned, and though the bared arm, tanned by exposure to wind and sun, is the emblem of the world's worker, yet the throbbing brain lends to the bared arm the helps of its discoveries and creations. Intelligence and labor are the only passports to success. If I respect the young man who beautifies the old roof-tree by bringing to its shelter some young woman who is to aid him in perpetuating the honor of his fathers, whose farm-work is in the line of intelligent experiment and common sense, I certainly admire the other who plunges into the jostling crowd of the city, not one of whom seems less eager than himself to win the vantage-ground. The world is not so great but that a man's fame or dishonor may span it in a brief hour. The old ways of living have retired beyond the borders of the older settlements, and steam and electricity hold the keys to the world's commerce. The new era is one of books and of thought. One nation exchanges its commodity with another; the exchange is carried on with mutual profit and with mutual encourage-

ment. In human intercourse as in commercial, the rule is the same though not so marked, but men change thought and opinion as farmers do day's works. All good thought, like good coin, has current circulation, a purchasing value; and of all true helps to true living none are so rich as the heritages of something written or done, left by some largely successful man to the world and its posterity. Force of example is an unconscious but powerful lever. To strengthen the dykes of public opinion, the better opinion and morality, is the true mission of a man. No one can better himself except he better those about him, and if he be a strong, self-reliant man, he will soon find himself the leader of a large body of his own kind, whether he be a ward politician, a thinker, an experimentalist, or a financier.

Scores of men and women go to their work, to the counter, the bench, the school and professions, day after day with a sort of dogged persistence in their strivings to get on in the great brotherhood of humanity, and those who lose sight of their earlier experiences in life stand least in its chances. It is a battle of the strong and the weak, and between whom the problem of the survival of the fittest is being constantly worked out. It is the race of competitive trial in which individual development and achievement are the tests, and in which the desire for precedence is the spur. Every man is

a knight-errant for himself. When people get to looking on the universe as a failure, it is a sure proof that such have become failures themselves, but the world keeps the score of those who succeed; of those who fail its cold charity makes no mention. All men come under some sort of observation; all men are teachers and all may be learners, whose record of good or ill is like the printed sheet which comes moist from the press every morning. Neighbors are sometimes mirrors at whom we may look to catch reflections of ourselves. If we make the rank and file of mankind who plod on with no hope or wish for anything better than food or shelter from day to day, we are mere burden-carriers, animated bundles of muscle and nothing more. Nature never intended such fate for men. The rocks were made for something else than to be ground into cement, the trees for something better than timber for ships and houses. Labor is not all of living, and yet only work makes life enjoyable; so Nature paints her pictures to be seen of men, lays her mountains across the pathways of men that they may admire her grandeur and her vastness. Nature means never to be forgotten, and strong, rugged as she is, ever expanding into new and beautiful forms, she is the perfect type of living as she is the gift of the Divine Intelligence. She is the handmaid of Brain, the teacher of Mankind.

OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

With the blushing of the maples,
Peering through the falling rain,
Come the sprites of bud and blossom,
And the days of song again.

By the margin of the river
Nods the catkin's yellow plume!
All the streets of Sunshine drifting
Full of snowy apple-bloom.

OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

I AM never quite alone in the woods. I feel that the trees are watching me with a hundred eyes, and are waiting with listening ears to hear what I shall say to them or to myself. One is never alone; the great Over Soul is here as elsewhere. Here are myriad voices. Here Growth and Decay are the superior activities, as they have been for centuries. Here the Speech of the Wind is akin to the Music of the Spheres. Here Nature has found her perfect expression. No, I am not alone, but I am not abashed as I stand in the dim cloisters of the woods, for these trees were the playmates of my childhood. I know all the trees about the old farm as I do individuals, and I feel like shaking their drooping boughs as I would shake the hand of a dear friend or acquaintance. I put my cheek to their rough barks, and there is a sort of sympathy that comes to me in return: I feel that the trees appreciate my greeting, and I am satisfied; yet they are simply trees, but each seems to have an individual memory.

Here are hoary beeches that were old with centuries before I knew them, and there is scarce one of their big, gray, gnarled bodies that does not bear an initial or mark of some sort of my own or of some of my boyhood's companions, and which the growing years have distorted into rude hieroglyphics on their swelling rinds. I have no difficulty in deciphering these characters so long ago graven with a boy's jackknife. I slowly spell them out; the woods are filled with voices and boyish laughter. How the echoes ring! The cows browse along the margin of the woods. I hear the twigs break under their heavy tread, and the quick snort of the restive colts as I come upon them unawares. Here comes a troop of jays; one lights on the topmost limb above me while the others keep on with short, jerky flights. The one above me wears the same old blue coat, and his voice has not improved one whit. The squirrels bark and scamper over the leaves, or sit perched high among the pine boughs, making with their sharp teeth tiny chips of the long pine-cones. A chipmunk, a species of smaller squirrel marked with lateral stripes of black and brownish-yellow, hugs close to an old hemlock log, keeping one bright eye on myself and one on his hole in the ground. I hear the young crows complaining in their nest in the thick hemlock tops, and the sharp report of a gun not far away increases their tumult. No, I am not alone, for the boy of a

generation ago is here with me. Only myself am grown old. How vivid the Imagination! Years count for nothing, for here is perennial youth.

The cattle have kept the old path to the spring, with its gaunt, scrawny apple-tree above it, which every autumn hangs full of bitter-tasting, red-cheeked apples for the entertainment of the crows and gray squirrels, and an ancient birch, grown a little stouter perhaps with age, which has many a time lent me a strip of bark for a drinking-cup, — a silver drinking-cup with an old-gold lining, — overtops the pigmy fruit-bearer. This spring was a favorite with the haymakers when the July heats fell along the slopes above the woodland, and many a time have I filled a brown earthen jug with its crystal sweets and carried it into the fields to hide it under the cool side of a fragrant haycock or in the shadows of the hedge by the broad-topped wall. I mark the latter place by a tall hardhack bush, where a yellow spider has spun an enormous web of gossamer which is held stoutly in place by strong doubled and twisted threads from the spider's loom, which radiate outward from a common centre with almost geometrical exactness. Over this curiously fashioned network of filmy lines and angles were often strown bright beads of dew long after the wet had dried off the grass and stubble. I mark the place further by its being in the deep shadow of a sugar pear-tree whose fruit was early turning

purple in the midsummer sun. The bobolinks indulge in great merriment as I go under the cherry-trees with my shining burden, and sing at the top of their voices, —

> "Brown jug, brown jug,
> See it glisten, see it glisten,
> He, he, he!"

and it used to make the mowers laugh as they kissed its dusky lips.

Through the narrow vista of low scrubby pines I get a glimpse of an old sugar-camp. These pine-lands were years ago favorite feeding-grounds for the partridges when they were strown with crimson plums from the thorn-bushes which then grew here luxuriantly, and with my gun on my arm I push through the low bushes to the ruins of the sugar-camp. The flat rocks, oblong-shaped and sharp-cornered, gleaned from the pasture ledges, which held the great kettles in place as they swung in chains from a stout pole spiked firmly at each end to heavy posts set deep in the ground, wear coats of vivid green plush; the charred sticks and black coals, quenched so long ago, half buried under a yellow drift of pine-needles, look up with a sombre friendliness. The crotched stakes which supported the rude rafters with their thatch of rough boards, thickly covered with pine and hemlock boughs, have fallen flat in their decay, but the stalwart

pines are here and sing the same lullabys when their tops are stirred by the winds.

Here is a score of burly sugar-maples, with thick-limbed tops, and knee-high about their corrugated trunks are the weazened auger-holes where I have driven many a whittled spile or sap-spout. There is a great difference in the way the sap of the maple begins its flow. One tree hardly waits for the auger to be pulled from the tree before its sweets pour outward, a gushing stream, and the spile is driven quickly in and the trough put in position to catch the treasure; another maple will hold back its tide of sap for minutes after its side is pierced, to finally come with a slow drip-drip as if the drops were being squeezed from the roots by some great force. Generosity and niggardliness are as much the quality of the sugar-tree as of one's neighbors. Here are the sapling pine-troughs under the trees, untouched since their overturning at the close of the season of which I write. I tip one of them over and a striped snake glides away into the leaves and thick underbrush. I make no effort to detain the fellow. I rather admire his beauty and brilliant markings; I have no enmity for harmless things. The better I know Nature, the less aversion I have for her creeping things, and the sooner the world gets to looking in the same direction the better it will be for humanity. Nothing exists without a purpose, and who shall question that Infinite

purpose? I have spent many nights here under the bright stars of March with only the owls and my roaring fires to keep me company. An owl will fill the night woods with sonorous echoes with a single blast of his trumpet.

"Hoo, hoo-o-hoo-o——o, hoo-o!"

he shouts, and there seems to be an owl in every tree. I shout in return, and the reply comes still nearer

"Hoo-hoo-oo-hoo——oo!"

cutting a note or two short in his hasty courtesy. I often wondered if the light of my fire was any easier to his eyes than the glare of the sunlight, for like an old-fashioned lover, his owlship came at the same hour every night and never went till morning.

The winds change suddenly and the camp is filled with dense smoke, but a moment later a new current takes it swiftly upward through the boughs of the hemlocks and pines. The sap in the kettles hisses and sputters as it boils up against their hot sides, and clouds of steam float away into the darkness like wraiths, disembodied spirits, or whatever the imagination might conjure up of ghostly shape, and about midnight an uncanny feeling creeps over me, for I remember all the ghost-stories which were ever told me, but I get out into the breeze, the raw March wind, prickly with frost-needles,

and poke my fears into the fire. How the dry pine-wood crackles and roars, and the sparks, how brilliant they are, as they go scurrying into the thick foliage, looking like so many stars amid the tree-tops. When the smoke drifts down low into the swamp, the sky is full of stars and calm. The same sky looks down through the trees to-day.

The sap-spouts or spiles were whittled out during the long winter evenings in the light of the pine-knot blaze, with the shadows dancing up and down the walls taking grotesque forms, and to keep them company I used to make queer-looking shapes of shadowy heads with my hands, working my fingers to give them semblance of animation. On the old-fashioned mantel-piece, so high I could reach it only by standing in the low basket-bottomed chairs, the little square clock kept note of the hours, and back a bit from the open fire, with its smutty-nosed tea-kettle hung midway on the slender crane, singing in high-pitched key, the wide-rimmed spinning-wheel kept up a vibrant bass to the tea-kettle's song the whole evening through. As the March sun rides higher up the sky, an exploring expedition is made to the woods to see if the snow is thawing about the feet of the maples. When the snow begins to melt away from their roots it is time to get out the spiles and to tap trees. The long sled is shovelled out of the drifts piled up by the big blow which ushered in this blustering

month, and with the oxen yoked to the well-loaded sled and its paraphernalia of the sugar-camp and sugar-maker, the start is made over the hill along the drifted trail of the winter wood-road. The wind blows freshly, full of bracing cold from the White Hills fifty or sixty miles away, as the crow flies, across the valley to the westward, and the crust made by the last rain glitters like cloth-of-diamonds in the sun. The oxen slump here and there, leaving stains of blood on the white snow, but in the woods the crust is not so stiff and sharp, and the oxen answer the goad-stick more readily, and are less hesitating in their movements. The roads to the trees were "*swamped*" the fall previous, yet the first drive around is a tedious journey through the snow, often hip-deep and untrodden as it is. From the sled-road trails are struck out on all sides to the sap-trees, leaving at each tree its allotment of spile and trough. Tapping trees is slow work, and one's arms grow wearied with so much twisting and boring; but the first step has to be taken, and in sugar-making this is about the easiest. One spile is put into each of the smaller trees while two and three are driven into the larger, and with the troughs put in position the sugar-maker has only to gather the run night and morning. A large molasses-hogshead has been procured from the grocery at the Four Corners, engaged of the trader in the autumn before, — for there is

always a good market for empty hogsheads in the country; a hole large enough to admit a water-pail is cut into its staves, when it is securely chained to the cross-bars of the sled, and the tour is thus made; the sled groaning and squeaking as it twists about the stumps and over the boulders scattered along the way. From the main avenue sinuous paths, narrow single trails, reach out into the gray vistas of sapling growth; up and down among the runs and hollows go the men in their red shirt-sleeves, for through these slippery alleys of the snow the sap has to be carried in pails to the sleds, and the men are glad when the last tree is visited, when the team is headed for the fires. But these are not the only sap-gatherers, for the chickadees and woodpeckers are great sap-topers. How carefully the teamster coaxes his mottled oxen over the rough road with his liquid burden! A sudden stopping or pitching of the sled throws showers of sap-spray into the air; and though it is nothing but sap, the sweetwater of the maple, it represents to the sugar-maker a deal of hard work, so he gets as much of his treasure into camp as he can. It is when the nights are freezing cold and the days are bright and warm that the team is busiest, and if a light snowfall has come over night the next day will be a "*sap-driver.*"

With the sugar-maker a watched pot boils best. The kettles are to be kept full and the fires as well

urged to their hottest glow. On no account must the boiling sap overflow, nor must the ever-thickening syrup get too shallow in the kettles, and when the "*syrup*" point is reached all the kettles are emptied into one, and under which the fires are slowed down and the utmost watchfulness is bestowed upon it. An egg well-beaten is thrown in to purify the hot syrup, and the impurities, quickly driven to the surface, are skimmed off as fast as they appear. A bit of snow-crust and a "*sampling* spoon" tell the story, — "Done," when the bailing and straining of the amber sweets into the kegs is begun. The work of "*sugaring-off*" is an operation requiring still more care. Oftentimes, just before the "*graining*" stage is reached, the boys and girls of the neighborhood turn out for a visit to the sugar-camp, to see the sugar-makers and to feast on that rare confection of their make, known in the native dialect as "*stick-chops*"; and rightly named it is. But the season is generally a short one, the road through the woods grows bare in spots; the sun rides higher still; the slopes are clear of snow; and at last the sap has done its running, and we look up into the trees, into their ruddy tops, and spring has really come.

These moss-covered rocks and drifts of yellow needles, with the dead rain-bleached coals heaped athwart the old dismantled fireplace where the big iron kettles once hung in stout chains, and the

decaying timbers of this, once upon a time, March inn of the maple woods, are like Runic inscriptions written amid pillars of stately pines and over their brown floors, and are to be deciphered only by one who has carried in his heart for years the golden key by which their mysteries are unlocked. Their rude lines grow into rare sketches and woodland story; but as I leave them to seek the uplands where the farmer is carting his rich compost upon the brown ploughed lands, and where the men are at work to the joyous accompaniment of rare bird-music, with the green world at my feet, they fade slowly out in the sunshine that falls so softly across the lap of May. It is a lasting pleasure that comes to one who makes

> "His hearth the earth, his hall the azure dome."

Nor is there any taint of alloy in the gold of his content who finds in Nature's unnamed, unsurveyed highways of the woods and fields, —

> "Where his clear spirit leads him, there his road
> By God's own light illumined and foreshowed."

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

Life's recompense is doubly rich:
Duty well done brings the fair fame
That's won amid Life's quiet ways
In emulation of His name.
More lasting than the peace of Earth
Is that from sources far above
Earth's discontent;—the Overheart,
The broad, deep fountain of God's love.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

I AM reminded by some people I have known of the kingbirds that once haunted the orchard slopes of the old country homestead, and I have a prejudice against them which I have never been able to overcome. Perched upon the topmost bough of some apple-tree, with a self-conscious and perky air, the kingbird jerks out his rasping note which sounds like the rough scraping of a violin-string, thrown out at uncertain intervals, never approaching the hint of a song at its best, a moment later to sweep downward into the blushing red clover-blossoms after the most delicious morsel of the field, the honey-bee, or else to go tilting after some favorite songster of ours that has unfortunately attracted this insolent's attention, and whose presence within his domain is to the kingbird an unpardonable offence. The kingbird is the self-constituted special policeman about the old farmhouse without pay, but he takes his remuneration, as some grown people do, *sub rosa*.

After one of these short flights the kingbird returns to his perch, and from which sentinel-like

he overlooks his domain in silence. But what a marauder he is among the honey-gatherers! In some localities he is better known as the bee-martin; but whether he goes under one name or another, he is entitled to the dislike of his feathered neighbors, and his shrill twitter is no less discordant nor less disliked. Crows and hawks give the premises a wide berth wherever the kingbird has chosen his domicile, — more, I apprehend, from a well-bred dislike to such quarrelsome dispositions as his is, than from any feeling of cowardice. Larger than the bluebird, he is of like pugnacious character, conducting himself with true Jacksonian spirit, believing that the victor should take to himself the spoils. He is the Dick Turpin of the airy highways, the gentleman of the road, the bully of the orchard tree-tops. He is ready to run a muck with anything that grows feathers or that flies. Throw a stick or a stone at the fellow, and after a narrow circle or two down he alights with a saucy, careless action, as provoking as it is indescribable, on the topmost spur of the selfsame apple-tree, and there he swings in the wind and sun to his heart's content until you have disturbed him again, or until some bird comes in sight, when he is off for a chase or another fight. Like all the family of Fly-catchers, he is always on the alert for his game, which, sportsmanlike, he always takes a-wing.

My admiration for the bluebird is not much

greater. The poets may say all the pretty things they please of him, but his appearance in the early days of spring is the beginning of a season of heart-burnings among the martins and other miniature housekeeping birds. His early movements ever remind me of the man who invariably forecloses his mortgage at the first breaking of its condition by taking possession. The bluebird is great on the foreclosing process; that branch of bird-law must have been his special study. If he finds a martin-house empty he pre-empts at once, and if he finds the martins are ahead of him he will worry them out of the neighborhood after a season or two of persecution. If the bluebird once gets his eye on a good location, like the real estate speculator, it is his in time by hook or crook. The little fellow may be very inspiring as he hops along the fences, his blue coat contrasting with a refreshing brightness against the ploughed lands brown and bare, and the dead stubble of the fields in the opening spring days, and the moist winds of showery April are not fresher with promise of swelling foliage and bursting bloom than he,

"Flying before from tree to tree,"

yet I always think of him as a heartless robber and a despoiler of other people's homes. Years ago, when I was a youth, my father built for me a bird-house, — a dainty little church, with miniature

steeple and long windows at the sides, with hooded portico and columns, and with fit ceremony it was set up at the end of the long wood-house on its white-painted support, and dedicated to the martins. The snows had gone, the leaves on the oaks were hardly thinking of bursting their buds, and the martins came one April morning with the sun, — a whole colony of them, taking possession without ado. What a busy season it was with them! They held their conventions on the long ridge-pole of the barn below the highway, and from their chatter and the unanimity of their action I thought them to be very clever reasoners, and a very sensible bird people. The nests were soon built and their domestic life had begun. As far away as those days now are, I can see the broad lawn sparkling with morning dew and yellow dandelion disks crossed and recrossed with the network of their shadows, and with many a delicate tracery of curve and line as these neighbors of mine flew thickly and at random across the bright sunbeams. What a chorus of strong, robust voicings was theirs! Many a morning did I stop to listen to their *peu*, *peu*, *peu*, a strong musical note of much vibrant quality, as I went down the path on my way to the old brick schoolhouse at the Corners. He was not unaware of the tyrannical disposition of the kingbird, for I noticed that they never met without a combat; yet I noticed that the martin never sought the quarrel, and

was much the more dignified of the two. I much admired his bravery, for no more alert guardian of the poultry lived about the farm than this purple-coated songster, and the poultry had erelong learned the note which sounded the near approach of the predatory hawk, and upon hearing it would scurry to cover with the utmost speed. Everywhere this beautiful bird wins the friendship of the farmer. But with the first frosts in the lowlands they would go away, and without warning, or hardly a good-by; and well I remember the silent, lonely days when the little church was deserted. Winter came and went as all winters do, and as the martins went so they came, for on another bright morning in another April there they were circling joyously about the old home as if they had never been away, and among them I seemed to recognize my old acquaintances of the previous summer, with the south-winds blowing the dandelions into tiny disks of gold, strewing the fields with their brilliant blossoms. The martins and myself grew up together and never were better friends. The sleek, glossy coats of these fellows shone in the sun like burnished ebony touched with purple, and how proud I grew to be of them! for they were known for the wide circuit of two towns, and were the subject of much envy in the hearts of some of my youthful companions. After some ten years of out-going and in-coming I noticed one early spring

day a trio of bluebirds inspecting the property, but before they had succeeded in their scheme of usurpation the old dwellers had returned and were in full possession. A few days later the bluebirds had returned in larger force and the siege was begun that lasted three years. The first year the bluebirds were hardly more than meddlesome, and the martins held their ground; the second year the bluebirds were occupying the rear end of the church, and that fall the martins went away never to occupy their old home again, for when they had returned the next spring they found the little church covered with the pugnacious meddlers of the two previous years, and disgusted, evidently, they went away never to return. From that day to this, as far as I know, not a martin has been seen about the old home place. I spent a limited amount of powder and small shot in the attempt to drive away these blue-coated intruders, the most of which is still embedded in the sides of the old weather-worn bird-house; but the bluebirds were victorious, and I have never quite forgiven them. I never questioned the wisdom of the martins for departing, as the world was before them; for bad company is ever to be shunned, and I have no doubt but that they are as happy to-day in some other home, as when they overlooked the broad meadows and deep-wooded valley which hid the waters of the not far off Songo.

If people insist upon interjecting themselves into your affairs, and there is no way of avoiding their persistent interference and uncomfortable attentions, their clack and clamor, their petty meannesses and aggressions, do as the crows and hawks, the robins, and other summer songsters do, — give such people a wide berth, even if you have to go out of your way a little. If they get too close to you in the community, nail up the doors and windows nearest them; if they get into one end of the house, pack up quietly and leave them the field, which, if not the most satisfactory to your sense of right and justice and personal dignity, is certainly the most peaceable, and in the end the more profitable. The presence of a person who is troubled with moral atrophy is to be avoided.

Every neighborhood has its quota of human kingbird and bluebird, its personified cent-per-cent, its heartless, senseless gossip, its argus-eyed monitor of the neighborhood morals, its jealous, dictating spirit, its disturber of households. Don't let them get their finger into your button-hole; shun them and their sayings and doings as you would the foul scents that drift from their chimney-tops. I have sometimes thought a little wholesome discipline of old-time ducking-stool and pillory or stocks would be the proper thing. I have met people before now who were, like a clock, evidently wound up to run for twenty-four hours. They were en-

cyclopædias of local, personal history, and the pictures of this or that person's characteristics were made by them much after the fashion of the professional etcher; it was mostly a process of scratching and biting. If you are a stranger in a new community you will always find some would-be generous-hearted soul who will give you the inside and outside history of every family whose name may drop upon your hearing. I ever give such a wide berth. They are a blotch on humanity, these self-appointed gazetteers of communities. I have known some people to become so interested in the affairs of others, that they make the long vigil of the night to discover some secret failing of their neighbor that they might be the first to retail the sweet morsel. I have one in mind now, a so-called church-woman of excellent standing in her own estimation, who would not deem it beneath her sense of self-respect and honesty to do a little detective work on the sly. I have heard many a sly and poisonous insinuation from such people whose moral scent is so keen, made out of mere conjecture, and I have wondered if they could discover the mud upon their own skirts, did there happen to be any there. I have also wondered at times if some people did use Lubin to aid them in hiding the uncleanliness of their own person. So I have thought those active conservators of the private morals might be setting other people by

the ears much as a backwoodsman builds his triangular smudge-fires to keep away his unwelcome visitors, the black flies and mosquitoes. Smoke is a great thing, if you can get it to blow in the proper direction. A ducking-stool and pillory for such are none too severe. Such treatment would be hardly more than homœopathic in character; and yet I have thought that public opinion was a worse pillory than any made with carpenter's tools.

The truth of the matter is, that some people have too little of honest occupation, too little of good wholesome toil; too much smell of Patchouly and Jockey Club, and too little of the smell of the factory, of the ploughed lands and of the woods, too little of their own business to attend to, and too much time to devote to the affairs of other people. There is too much preying upon other people's substance and reputation; and yet, if ever the time comes when the kingbirds and bluebirds that walk the earth in human guise become true men and women, when neighbors respect neighbors' rights, and manliness and womanliness are the keynotes of action and living, when to be one great brotherhood is the universal aspiration, when honesty and truthfulness and sympathy make the staff upon which are written the songs of life and living, then the earth will be a Utopia indeed.

PLAIN FARE.

Thrice favored he who has a wife
Who bends or unbends, as her fortunes will;
Whose heart withholds no guerdon sought:
If rich, is blest; if poor, hath riches still.

PLAIN FARE.

WIXT hay and grass," has a deep meaning for the farm household. The apple-bin is empty, the potatoes in the cellar are buried in whitish-green sprouts a yard or less in length; and of all the store of rotund beet, cabbage, and turnip, they have gone out the big cellar-doors to be ploughed into the garden long ago. To be sure, the parsnips are still plentiful, but the cook rebels against parsnips three times a day. The pork-barrel, like the widow's cruse, is bottomless. There are eggs enough to be had for the going after, when the hens do not steal their nests under some ragged bush by the wall and spoil the eggs by over assiduity and a desire to bring up a large family. Mayhap all the calves are heifers this year, and of too extra stock to veal, so the country butcher is relied upon with increasing disappointment. The larder is threatened with a drouth as to variety; but if any of the preserves or flaky jellies of the housewife's putting up are yet remaining in the cool, dark places about the house, here is an element of happiness in the fam-

ily. Dandelion greens are tabooed twice or thrice served, and what is there to eat! "No berries till June," the housewife sighs; and it touches her pride sorely to see the men come in from the fields to gather about her dimity, snow-white board, always spread with an abundance of that which would be appetizing at almost any other season of the year, now grown commonplace in the dearth of relishes, only to eat sparingly, and in that half-hearted way which is dispiriting to every woman of spirit and hospitality. Pork fried, boiled, or swimming in soups is ever the same. It has that same unctuous fatness in whatever guise it comes. The men-folks appreciate the situation, and say nothing, well knowing that when the feast does open it will be well worth attending three times a day. But the farmer does not bother himself much with house affairs. The hens and chickens, the eggs and dairy part of the farm system, are appurtenant to the house treasury. The housewife regnant must rely upon her own ingenuity to tempt these faltering appetites.

I have heard much of the queens of society,— that conventional elysium of upper-ten-dom with which the real men and women of the world have so little acquaintance,— but I have seen many a queen of the farm back among the valleys of a certain New England state, and I have thought the womanhood of the quiet, shady hamlet assur-

edly charming. But there are varieties of womanhood. The rosy-cheeked lassies of the farm household, the robust, sensible, matronly, farm wife, often not less regal in style, and as often more graceful than her city cousin, because more natural, must be known to be loved and appreciated. The chief councillor of the farm court of exchequer is never without her meed of honor.

I never ride past a farm-house, and note the array of shiny milk-pans set out on the stoop to dry, looking for all the world like a row of polished shields in the bright June sunshine, but what I start on a journey into dreamland, and conjure up a vision of the goddess of the dairy, and an imaginary feast of strawberries and cream, if perchance the creeping vines of the strawberry are in bloom by the wayside. I can remember such a womanly divinity of a generation ago. Did ever any one make such light, golden corn-bread or white feathery cream biscuit as were kneaded by her snowy hands and baked in the ancient tin oven by the heat of a brisk open fire, whose doughnuts and pies were of such delicious flavor as no modern cook can imitate.

Ye gods, what a delicious fruitage of wild strawberries came with hot July from the side-hill rick above the meadow brook, all the sweeter by their having been plucked and hulled by mother's deft fingers as a tea-table offering to the tired hay-

makers. I shall never forget the aroma of the mid-summer strawberry, blushing so ardently under the hot glances of its sun-god lover. What a glorious treat were they in their frosting of cool rich cream, fresh from the dark milk-room in the north corner of the granite-walled cellar, never approached by any combination of Jersey and Sharpless of more modern date! What huge juicy berries, a half-dozen pendant on a single stalk, grew about the roots of the blackened stumps of the burnt lands! How the mowers feasted on them with crimson-stained lips and fingers as they swept their glittering scythes under the clusters of long, slender stems heavy with their burden of toothsome temptation hidden away in the shadows of the succulent grasses. To the mower the feast is an alternate one of honey and strawberries. A warning buzz, and the humble-bee is telling in his way that some one is disturbing his hive in the stubble. He hovers excitedly over a bunch of dead grass,—*rowett* the mower calls it,—close down in the grass roots. It looks most like the home of the field-mouse, and when the lover of humble-bee honey has descried the nest, down he sits flat with legs sprawled out on either side with rifle in hand. When the big, angry bees blunder out, pat goes the rifle, flat side down, and the slow, unwieldy gatherer of meadow sweets is disabled or killed. Very few bees are found in a single colony, and the nest is soon taken.

The mower plucks his prize from the hollow in the fresh stubble, and with prudent apprehension ascertains that there are no bees in the gray, musty ball; for the sting of the humble-bee is hardly less to be dreaded than that of the yellow-jacket, the paper-maker of the woods and meadows, and who has pre-empted a clump of maple-sprouts right in our mower's pathway.

If you follow the track of the scythe you will see this heart-shaped domicil of the hornet, grayish-white in the sun, and hung well up in the fork of a slender branch just tinged with scarlet. It is a marvelous structure, with its tiers of inner chambers supported by shapely columns of woody fibre, one above another, catacomb-like cells, insect tenement-houses closely wrapped about in a water-proof shell, some of the best specimens of which are often fifteen inches in diameter, and in length something more than that, and about which constantly hover alert-winged sentinels who keep close to the aperture at the bottom of the nest. This is the grand entrance, betrayed by no hooded porch or ornate decoration,—simply a round hole, and it is well guarded by its insect tyler. The hornet is by nature a great insect-eater, and not less is he a dear lover of the choice fruits and flowers of the garden and their rich juices. Many a purple plum shows where he has tapped the downy frosting of its rind by a tiny exudation which gleams in the sun like a minia-

ture dew-drop. The dead-leaf color of this insect-scavenger's nest hardly betrays to the foot-voyager through the leafy lowlands its nearness, except by the unusual hum which sounds above the commoner notes of the woods. I have a great respect for the hornet, and I should hesitate to interfere with any pet theory of his, for I have in mind an experience which was begun on my part in a spirit of boyish mischievousness; but I poked my stick into the hornet's nest once too many times, and the troops on our side immediately converted the action into a Bull Run. A buffet from a hornet in full tilt is a shock to make one reel. He is the unerring marksman most to be dreaded of all the family of horn-bearers.

Sometimes the score of bag-like cells in the nest of the humble-bee are full of honey, but more often they are but a congregation of pupæ. What despoilers of homes men are! If the bee hovering over the ruins of his nest at our feet could make us to understand his mumbled language no doubt it would read much that way. What a lecture he is reading to this Antean mower whose mythic club is metamorphosed into the gleaming, keen-edged knife that sings a gleeful song as it pares the meadow floors with wide-cut swath. What a big fellow for such short, stubby wings this humble-bee is, swathed in such broad bands of gold; and what a rumpus he makes digging into the old nest; but his

fellows are scattered, and no murmur of response comes to his continuous hail of beating wings.

But June comes before July in the calendar of our farmer, and Summer's luscious bounty is still in the bud or blossom. There are long days ahead. The corn is sprouting in the ground; across the potato-patch the imprisoned tubers are reaching their emerald fingers up through the thin crust of the earth to the sun and rain, so we may easily mark the alignment of the rows, but the days of hoeing are not yet. There are hemlock trees to be cut. The bark is to go to the tannery and the tawny-colored logs to the mill. The tax-collector bothers the farmer as well as other people; and taxes must be paid. A few cords of bark, a few thousand feet of sawn lumber, find a ready market; so the woods pay a tribute as well as the fields. For this particular work not much preparation is necessary, beside the grinding and sharpening of the axes. It is a rare day in the merry month of June, when the days are longest. The birds begin with each morning a merrier, madder strain in their wanton love-making; the green pile of the carpets which overspread field and slope grows longer and more flexible in the wind, more yielding to the footstep, more charming to the eye. Robin Goodfellow wears his green suit to set the fashion, and withholds no boon of airy sprite from Nature; but all are out in full holiday attire, bent on wild revel with the hamadryads,

the buds and blossoms. I never hear Bobolink but what I think Robin Goodfellow has taken him somewhere unawares and has bewitched him completely, else he could not reel from his unwritten music, its broken chords and numberless oddities of tone and expression, such ecstasy of song. Robert of Lincoln is, of all the feathered choir, the irrepressible songster, whose tenor charms his fellows into silence. He is the prodigal of song. His notes come like the patter of the rain-drops on the roof, so fast they push each other from his dusky throat.

Little has your true farmer of sentiment. He is not oblivious to these beauties of Nature so bountifully bestowed upon him, but he accepts them as of absolute right to which he has an unquestionable title; and if he feels the rush of upward flowing saps, the inner response to the Infinitude of Nature, he can hardly tell you why. Prose does him good service, let poetry alone; and yet no one can afford such sunrises and sunsets at his porch-door as himself. Plain fare, plain habits, and plain thought, speech, and manliness make up the sum of life. The cloud-capped hills, the quiet valleys and fertile fields, belong to the economies of Nature. His task is from sun to sun, and night, glorious summer night! is but a partition-wall to keep the days apart; fences in the gray pastures of Time the nights are, when the blinking stars watch over the sleepy farmhouses, to fade away when men awake.

This morning the choppers have come to breakfast. It is early, for the lawn is glistening wet with dew; but the robins have finished their matins long since. The landscape is becalmed. The gray smoke from the tall porch chimney climbs straight up into the sky till it is dissolved in the thin air of invisibility. There is not a single sail to be seen in the great ocean of blue overhead on this still morning.

Painting the broad brims of our straw hats with odorous turpentine before leaving the house and collecting our accoutrements of steel, we sally out over the way to the hemlocks. Warrior-like, each man carries a wooden spud, a curved staff, its flattened end shod with steel, and a glittering axe, most likely thrown over the shoulder; and thus we trudge along, side by side or in single file. Axemen are great talkers, and each is a professor of woodlore. As they swing along the field with steady stride, they seem like gladiators on their way to some amphitheatre. I admire the sun-tanned, brawny arms of these sons of the woods, with their sleeves rolled above their elbows. What pent-up strengths lie hidden in those browned bunches of muscle the hemlocks will soon discover! At the outworks of the timber-line hosts of midges, black flies, and mosquitoes come up to meet us; but they do not fancy the pungent perfume of the paint-shop, and we go on unmolested by these pests of the June

woods. Along the border of the woods are tussocks of high-bush blueberry growing luxuriantly; their white bloom is plucked and eaten by the men with a relish. The blossoms are slightly acidulous and quite palatable. The chopper finds especial delight in the flavor of the tender sienna-colored shoots and twigs of the yellow-birch, and which smack strongly of checkerberry. A bitterish taste remains in the mouth which is not unpleasant. All about are the tall, shapely trees, with long, drooping masses of grayish-green moss trailing down from the tips of the limbs. The head chopper holds his axe by the handle, helm downward like a plummet, to see which way the tree leans; then selecting the place to lay its broad top, cuts in the lower scarf to make way for the big chips, which fly far out into the underbrush. How the stout blows rain down against the butt of the tree, chuck-chock-chuck! making sharp staccato echoes which go flying up among the big limbs, rattling down the brown petioles, short, stubby, dried-up needles of the hemlocks, in showers about our shoulders. The black flies are legion. The red squirrels and chipmunks come out to see the meaning of these strange sounds. One little fellow, all red, with big bushy tail cocked over his back, sits pertly overhead and chatters away in a shrill, scolding voice, till the spine of the tree begins to splinter and crack as the axe reaches its marrow. The tree poises on

the centre of the stump for a moment, and with a shiver as of dread it sways to the right, and then with a mighty crash that seems to jar the floor of the forest the first giant is at our feet. The next thing is to girdle the fallen tree with our axes every four feet along until the thicker limbs are reached. The bark is started with the axe its whole length, and then pried off with the spuds; so the first tree is soon stripped of its covering, which is left to dry in the sun before piling. For days the woods are full of strange sounds: the sharp speech of the axe and the crash of falling trees fill them with disturbance and alarm for their dwellers; but enough timber has been cut to make a respectable raft down the pond to the mills, and the birds and squirrels are at last at liberty to discuss the havoc of the axe. I have no doubt, if we could get at the record of the court which they will organize to inquire into the cause of this disturbance of their domain, that we should there read, "An ambition to be great among the trees of the forest, if successful, is fraught with extreme peril and often untimely accident. It is better to be of less importance, wherewith one finds a larger store of content!" "Bean porridge in the pot nine days old," may not be a delightful contemplation to an æsthetic appetite, but it made the sturdy sinew of the pioneers of Revolutionary times, and no doubt appeased the hunger of many of our less remote ancestors. Plain fare is the secret of good health, as occupation is of a contented mind.

AFTER THE COWS.

Beside the rail-fence and its ragged hedge,
Aglow with the sumac's crimson flame,
Down the pasture-slope to the roadside edge,
Is the slender path the cattle came.

AFTER THE COWS.

CATTLE lend to roadside and pasture a peculiar charm. Without its group of slow-moving herd leisurely cropping the sweet, tender grasses that grow rankest among the fragrant ferns and in the moist places of the hollows, or else scattered about the slopes where the shadows fall broadest and coolest as the midsummer sun gets toward the top of its journey, stretched out ruminant and lazy-like with eyes half shut, chewing the cud of complacency, animated spots of rich, warm color against the cooler verdure, the summer landscape would seem to lose some of its quality, some of its perfectness. The mosaic of rock, tree, and fence is incomplete without its sheep huddled up against the shady side of the wall or hedge, looking for all the world like a bank of snow that the June sun had overlooked; and its indolent herds, whose glossy coats of white, red, and brown shine like distant shields, whose tossing horns glint and glisten in the sun like burnished spear-heads. I happened into the studio of a friend a short time

since, and upon his easel was a large picture nearly finished; but a few touches were needed to make it a masterpiece, and even then it was a magnificent work. The sky was luminous with reflected light; the clouds were as fleecy, as light, as those blown over the September hills and woods, along the margin of which drifted a filmy web of bluish vapor, a warm-tinted haze. An opening in the woodland led away across a low level that grew narrower with the growing distance, giving abundant scope to the imagination; while in the nearer foreground the tall grass had grown tanned and dun-colored under the heat of the August sky; and farther off the brownish-white backs of a flock of sheep overtop the uncut meadow-rue and blue-joint. The hardhack bushes have lost their pink blossoms, the dainty flush of the wild-rose has vanished, but the flying clouds have caught their tints. The clouds are real clouds as you stand back and look at them through your partially closed hand. How airily, lightly, they lie along the distant tops of the woods aglow with delicate tones! One forgets that this picture is the work of the human artist. The gilded frame which holds the grand picture seems like a broad doorway, beyond which lies a reality in Nature. The staccatto rat-tat-tat of the woodpecker, the coarse note of the crow dropping down from some ancient hemlock-top in the outer margin of the forest, the

smothered whir of the startled partridge, the jarring, rasping, discordant scream of the coward jays, the bark of the gray squirrel, and the strident music of creaking branches, are sounds which live in this idyl of the artist; and yet without its flock of nibbling sheep, its bit of pastoral life, the picture would lack the charm of completeness. The presence of the sheep, or of a group of cattle in the landscape, add the quality of actuality, of truthfulness, which makes one believe it to be a true story which the artist has told.

Hosts of pictures of the country came vividly to mind, sights and sounds that have slumbered since boyhood, almost; and yet, not the less real because they have so long been hung with their faces to the wall. The life of a farmer-boy, with all its drawback of stinted privilege, its homely commonplaces, its dearth of unnatural excitements, is gilded with a charm that his cousin of the city cannot understand or measure. His playgrounds are no less than the broad acres of the paternal homestead; his sports are not of marbles or hopscotch along blistering pavements, but are those of hardy out-door pastime, with rod and gun among the woods and flower-strewn meadows.

The rainy day that keeps the city cousin indoors sends the country boy to the laughing brooks, and into the cathedrals of the pines and hemlocks, and over the wet pasture-knolls. If the city has its

diversions, the country has its fascinations. As I go out through the suburbs of the city I sometimes see a drove of cattle tramping over the highway; and the awkward country lad who trudges along after them in the dust has not less of charm and interest than the brown-backed herd which has left hillside and runlet forever behind. There is no lack of romance to such a picture. I saw such an one to-day as I came out on the train. Another came with it of a boy, barefooted, with heart as light as air, scampering down the old highway below the orchard wall. He makes no stop or tarry till the scrub-pine this side the pasture bars is reached, where a too-venturous squirrel runs a race along the rail-fence with a swiftly-shied rock. I hear the dropping of the bars, and the echo comes back from the poplars in the swamp,—a rare musical note. The boy is myself. The cattle are over the hill. The pasture-side is steep, and over its slope are scattered patches of sweet-fern. I pluck a handful, and rub the leaves hard to get the fragrance which lingers with the memory of the old cow-path which hid itself not infrequently beneath their bloom. The ragged fence which separates the field from the pasture is overgrown with sumac and choke-cherry. These latter are laden with rich-looking clusters of puckery fruit, and among them the cherry-birds and robins are taking a free lunch,—a five-o'clock tea I should judge

by the chatter. They fly up the hill before me as if they expected me to give chase after them. I can discover them looking back furtively over their shoulders as they fly farther up the line of the old fence, but they keep up a steady chatter. I wonder if birds ever talk about their neighbors! but they must be saying something good of them, most of the time, for most bird-songs are of charming quality. I know of no bird-note that has not some redeeming feature in its roughest tone. What a climb the old pasture-hill always afforded my boyhood legs, and how they would ache when I got to the crest of the ridge. At the top I would take a moment's breathing-space; and what an outlook of hill and valley was spread out before me! for I am on the highest point of land for miles about. The great square chimneys of the homestead look up through the orchard-trees below me, and farther below are the gray roofs of the barns; and farther yet below is the dark line of shadowy woods, streaked with the yellowish-green of the meadows, with their single hay-barn, that reach beyond the limit of my vision; and one might almost say in truth it was the fairest picture the vision had ever limned:

> Northward, beyond the forest haze,
> Kataadin's dome of tree and rock
> O'erlooks Penobscot's waterways,
> The ancient graves of Norridgwock.

Westward, the sunset slowly trails
Its shadows through broad intervales,
Where Saco's slender thread comes winding down
To turn the whirring spindles of the town.

Beyond, the lofty White Hills make
The dusky, sharp horizon-line,
While to the southward, stream and lake
Wind outward through their maze of pine,
Where leagues away with silver speech,
The salt tides flood a shining beach
That looks far out upon the cool, blue seas,
Sail-whitened with a world's rich argosies.

Over the hill I go, but no cattle are in sight. Mid-pasture is a sinuous path the cows have made in the early summer as they came up from the old camp spring, up through the flowering thorn-bushes, white as they are in winter when the damp snow lodges in their thick-woven branches.

Through the gap in the broken wall the worn path runs, and close under the shadow of a gnarled, scarred birch, at the foot of which are deep holes in the yellow dirt where the cows and steers have stood and thrown the loose loam high over their backs to drive away the flies. I put my hand to my mouth, —

"Co-boss, co-boss, co, co, co!" —

and the answer comes from the woods a half a dozen times. Some sprite of the woodland has thrown

the echo outward in derision. I call again, and the answer comes from the herd at the farther end of the pasture a quarter of a mile away. It is "Spot's" voice that replies; I could tell it from a host of cow voices, — a trumpet tone as clear as that of a French-horn. Burroughs tells how many notes there are in the gamut of cow-music, but none ever sounded sweeter than the answering hail at night when the herd was to be driven up to be milked. Sometimes the fences got down in the woods, and then there was a tramp of the farm-hands over the headlands of the pond, and oftentimes the truants were not found until daybreak. What tramps those were through the shimmering moonlight, or through the pitch black darkness, with bright blazing torches of rolled birch or of pitch-pine split up into long, slender strips, and stoutly tied up with green wiccopy or leather-wood bark, a half a dozen splits or strips to each torch, to help us keep the trail of the herd left by their hoofs in the swamps and soft mould of the decaying leaves. How still the woods were, and how moist and chilling the night-wind in the hollows and lowlands; and how warmly it blew against the cheek as we came out upon the uplands. An owl would suddenly hoot out his greeting as he flew over our heads, and then the silence would fall deeper and more ominous than before; but we always found the cows, and brought them home

with us. We seemed like a group of town-criers as we went up and down the unlighted forest aisles calling the recreant cows and getting no answer.

Here come the cows! and trailing along after them is a swarm of midges, tiny black flies, that get into the ears, the nose, and eyes in an exceedingly uncomfortable sort of a way. They are legion, rising and falling, a perfect cloud-mass as they hover about, but they disappear as the herd gets into the breeze on the upper slopes. I have plucked a handful of tender clover-blossoms for "Spot," the favorite of the farm, and as she reaches out her nose to get the proffered dainty, I get a breath of her perfumed cud that is not surpassed by any

> "Odors from the spicy shore
> Of Arabie the blest."

It is a lazy, indolent pace that we take homeward over the hill and up the highway to the barns whose great doors are thrown wide open, and whose sweet-scented mows are in full sight; and, like some people I have known, I doubt if my otherwise well-trained cattle could withstand the temptation to help themselves were no one watching them. Good company is a very excellent restraint sometimes.

The sun is down, and the wind is up; the cherry-birds and the robins have finished their five-o'clock

tea. A single tree-toad adds his slender trill to the swamp-frog's deep bassoon, and what a tuning of pipe and horn! The fire-fly has hung his dim lantern low in the grass, or in the alders, when most of the twilight singers have gone to bed. Up from the meadow comes the song of the nightingale, the wonderful song of the veery, so clear, so full, so round and lingering in its cadences, dying away at last in a succession of prolonged but most perfect notes. No bird-note has ever charmed me and thrilled me as that of this night-bird of the meadows. No English nightingale can have mellower or sweeter song, — at least so it seems to me.

Such is the rare companionship of a summer evening jaunt after the cows; of these sights and sound-medleys; of dense woodland and pasture-lot; of unkempt fences and beaten highways; of gray days, and of days that are not gray; of wet, dripping skies and drifting mists, and of wind and calm. Nature has many an unwritten song, and many a written song as yet unsung. Her lovers hum them over lightly in their hearts, but only the birds and purling brooks, only the summer showers and driving storms, give them full volume. To hear a grand symphony from Nature, as Nature herself renders it, is to forget it never. But the men have come in from the fields, and the day closes as it begins, with the milking of the cows.

A LOTUS-EATER.

When Summer winds blew o'er the town,
And o'er the drowsy inland woods,
O'er sleepy marsh-lands, seamed and brown,
The sultriest of summer moods;
I dreamed of country lanes and nooks,
Of grassy orchard-slopes and trees,
Of crazy bobolinks, of brooks,
And meadow-bloom, and humming-bees.

A LOTUS-EATER.

ALL out-of-door life is full of poetry and charm. Even when the simmering heats of midsummer make the lower strata of the atmosphere tremulous with their passion, the drowsiness which steals over one who is free from the irksomeness of labor under the hot sun is crowded with rare dreams and fancies. The summer idler has all the resources of nature at hand. His feasts are laid among the lotus-eaters. His senses of seeing, hearing, and smelling are stimulated so they afford him the rarest of gratifications; but to be an epicure at the table over which Nature presides, one must be of very simple tastes and plain habit withal. Nature's sweetest songsters wear modest garb, and her grandest outlooks are reached only by wearisome climbing. Thrush, oriole, robin, or crazy Robert-of-Lincoln, listened to in their own homes, in field or wildwood, their melodies are ever quick to touch men's hearts and affections.

People of poetic temperament most enjoy the subtle beauties of the inner cloisters of the woods, or of the steep rocks and broken battlements of

the mountains; and to find the rare treasures in Nature, one must get away from the beaten track into the out-of-the-way places, the woodpaths, the nooks and dells whose mosses are wet with the spray of rushing waters, into the shadows of the alders, the meadow elms, among the blossoming rue and yellow snap-dragons.

A pleasant way of spending a summer day is to procure a plentiful supply of angle-worms, and with a reel of spare line, — silk is best, — a dozen Limericks well ganged with good strong gut, and a light, well-balanced rod, to take some ancient woodland path or wood-road which will lead you soonest and easiest into the meadows. There is no need to wait for a rainy day, for it is a fallacy to say that trout do not, or rather will not, bite well when the sun shines brightly. I have proved it to the contrary many a time; but the difficulty, that is, whatever difficulty there is, lies in this: no more wary fish lives in the brook than this selfsame trout; and arouse his suspicions ever so lightly, unless his larder has been a barren one for several days, you coax his troutship in vain. When the sun shines clearly, the surface of the brook, mirror-like, catches the reflection of every object near its banks; and where they are soft and springy, the slightest jar is sufficient to alarm every trout in the immediate neighborhood. Frequently, when you have reached the stream, you

discover with a sense of chagrin that an earlier bird, the other fellow ! is whipping the brook below. You may follow him with indifferent success, or you may go up stream trusting to soon get above the point where your rival set in. A trout-stream should be fished with the current, down. Your line precedes yourself, and your bait or lure approaches the trout the more naturally as it floats with the ripples into the snowy foam of the eddying waters. It is not a bad idea to follow the bed of the stream itself, if one does not care for the wetting he is sure to get. To avoid the dilemma of being anticipated by other fishermen, rise with the sun, and start off through the sparkling dew to the meadows. The world is fresh ; the robins are whistling up the winds on the orchard slopes. The breathing of the morning air is like sipping nectar, and the broad-leaved brakes and sweet-ferns scatter liquid diamonds on your path as you brush by them. You rush back into the buoyancy of boyhood. The years drop from you unawares, and your pulse quickens, while the smell of pines is like the bouquet of some precious vintage. Down over the sharp brow of the hill is the margin of the wood, with its wide-limbed beeches and flaring tops, where I have gathered many a bag of nuts in the brown autumn ; and here, at its westerly edge, is the old logging-road which leads straight to the meadows. The cattle-path runs

from one side to the other of the road, making a crooked sort of a trail, like the track of a drunken man. Cattle always turn aside for the slightest obstacle, even if it be nothing more than the lopping branch of the slender alder. The roadside is fringed with lichens and lightish-green blades of grass, tall and spindling, but the bluets, the white and purple violets, and the wood anemone, are here in abundance. There is enough to see as I follow the rough trail, with its slippery rocks and great tree-roots, washed bare by the spring-time torrents which came off the hillsides. A red-crested woodpecker is digging busily into the trunk of the black-barked hemlock for his breakfast of larvæ; the chickadees chirp and chatter among the scrub-spruces; a wood-pewee hops along beside me and keeps saying, "Pewee! pewee! peer!" in a low, sweet tone. A huge toad has begun his game of leap-frog for the day by jumping clumsily out of the way; a hen-partridge sounds swift notes of warning to her chicks, and runs suddenly under my feet to distract my attention until the chicks get safely to cover, to as suddenly fly off into the woods with a loud reverberant whir, not unlike the swift muffled roll of a drum.

But partly through the woods, and I have come to what the settlers called in the primitive days of log-houses and blazed highways the Plantation, — a circular opening in the woodland, and which used

many years ago to be the rye-field of the old farm. Huge stumps of the now rare *pumpkin* pine are scattered over its area; and among them are numerous tall stubs, washed clear of their sap by a century of storms, which reach fifty feet into the air, and their sides are as smooth and slippery-looking as obelisks. The place is lonesome enough, as all old rookeries are. I take to the woods again, and am fairly within them, when through the arched opening ahead is revealed the white bloom and graceful elms of Kemp's meadow. Clambering over the low brush fence, I have startled a huge snow-white owl from his roost; and with noiseless flight he scurries out into the sunlight and then back into the shadows of the black hemlocks. A solitary hawk eyes me from the spur of a tall dead tree as if I were an intruder. Perhaps I have given him good reason to regard me with suspicion, for I am perfectly silent and somewhat stealthy in my movements. Seeing that my tackle is all right, and putting some wet grass into my creel to keep the trout fresh and glossy, I creep up to the brook as softly as I am able and throw my hook with its wriggling worm deftly over the tall masses of pigeon-berry. It strikes the stream as lightly as a feather, — a swift, gleaming ripple, a half-audible plash, a tightening of the line, and a moment later, before one could count ten, the first trophy is landed in my basket, or willow creel. A

crow, perched upon the top of a tall pine in the margin of the alders, sings out, —

"Haw! haw! haw! kaw-r-r-r!
Kaw-r-r-r! kaw-r-r-r!"

a sort of guttural-like guffaw of approbation; but I pay no attention to his evident interest in my proceedings, and one trout after another goes into my basket until I have actually a full baker's dozen of spotted beauties out of this one pool. But I am not satisfied, — what angler ever was? — to leave such luck without another throw, and I have angled a good ten minutes without a bite. Patience is the secret of the successful angler. Deftness comes with experience.

As the sun gets higher in the sky, I wander farther down the stream, and with the sport comes the zest of a constantly changing landscape. The outline of the woods rises and falls like the long, rolling swells of the sea, and the path beside the brook is strewn with flower tones, soft and delicate as the hues of the clouds. Clumps of the blue-flag reach up out of the amber shallows, and toss their purple petals to the wind or dip caressingly to the water; the yellow blossoms of the graceful columbine gleam brightly against the dark verdure of the alders; beds of bog-arum, the calla of the meadows, white as the driven snow, are scattered along the runs; stalks of the spiderwort

add their charm of reddish-violet color to the modest garb and tiny flower of the early meadow-rue, and with the feathery tops of the blue-joint, shoulder-high, the cats-tail grass, the broad leaf and yellow globe of the cow-lily in the brook, with the stalwart daisies and buttercups, make the undulating levels of color that are found nowhere else in so perfect a combination. Shapely elms throw their shadows in round masses here and there at random athwart the mixture of bloom that fills the air with sweets; the hum of the bumble-bee, busily plucking the honey from the myriad blossoms, his sides splashed with gold-dust, the songs of warbler and throstle, the vagabonds of the lowlands, shaking out carol after carol of liquid tones and semi-tones, the chirping of the sparrows, the shrill challenge of the hawk, and the hoarse laugh of the crow, and the soughing of the pines, are but parts of the grand medley of Nature. For all my wildwood surroundings, I am not so far apart from humanity. I have passed two or three dilapidated barns, the wide-open doors of which, looking out upon the uncut meadows, made me think of Polyphemus and his one eye gloating over his victim. Their empty bins look as if hungry for the nodding grasses, and before the day is out I am driven to their shelter by a sudden shower.

What a lonesome, poverty-stricken interior a

single one reveals as I cross its wide threshold! What a littering of pale, rain-bleached water-grass strews the floor with its slovenly suggestion! An old, worn-out grindstone, loosely hung to its wobbly shaft, a rusty scythe, a rickety, weather-worn hay-rack, a pitch-fork or two, and a rake with a dislocation of its spinal column, make up its complement of haying-tools. While I am looking about my shelter, I hear the patter of the rain on the low, sloping roof, — the drip-drip of the water on the boards beside me from a leak in the loose shingles overhead; sharp flashes of lightning come in through the door and through the crannies and cracks in the sides of the building, and the crash of the thunder sounds like the ripping, stripping, and scraping of rafter and ridge-pole clean of their covering of board and shingle; but the sun comes out in the west, and the thick-falling drops glisten like a shower of brilliants. The rain has gone to eastward, and the thunder dies away in low growlings and mutterings beyond the farthest hills. The tree-tops are dripping with wet; their leaves glisten like silvered emeralds; and up and down their soaked trunks the lichens have slaked their thirst, and, doubly grown, lend their warm tints of old-gold, their reds, browns, and purples, to the cooler drabs and grayish, Quakerish tones of the rough bark of the elm-trees.

The rain has beaten the grass prone and flat,

but it will come up again with the morning sun when the water has dried out of it.

The tremulous whistle of the plover comes down off the uplands. The atmosphere, the floors of the air, are swept clean by the thunder, and far-off sounds come distinctly and seem near at hand; I hear the teams along the highway, and the shouts of the men in the fields on the upland slopes a mile away. I wander down the stream through the succession of meadows, whipping the brook with indifferent luck, for the stream has grown turbid and the trout do not take readily to the lure. Now and then a rapacious clutch upon the hidden hook is a signal for a deft twist and a sudden pull upwards. I have a study in oil, rapidly sketched, of a brook-trout captured that day, which measured over fourteen inches, which was one of the finest specimens of the redspot I have ever seen. I have had many a harder pull from trout less than half that size than from this prince of luck. A four-joint, twelve-ounce, lance-wood rod, with a very slender tip, did the work.

I catch the sound of children's voices; and through an opening in the woods I get glimpses of a gray roof and red chimneys, from one of which a thin ribbon of blue smoke curls lazily up, up, till the wind catches it and blows it into the hemlock-tops. But I have come to a fence. The stakes

which hold up its long, sagging poles have been driven this season; and to one of them is nailed a bit of board, across which is scrawled a notice to trespassers, — a species of free-hand charcoal drawing, — which I read with increasing interest. Here it is as I deciphered it: —

"Notis
eny Person ketched fishin' in this medder
will Be Prosekuted to ful eckstent of Law."

Here was an obstacle, certainly; and having a very wholesome regard for anything which smacks of legal process, I take a short cut over the knoll into the highway with a creel full of dainty trout, with a pair of wet feet, and an appetite which would put to shame the one I knew less than a week before in my city home, and which was ripe for anything from a boxberry to a beefsteak or a crisply-fried trout. I wondered as I went over the tussocks of tender brake and checkerberry, thick with black stumps and blueberry bushes, if the trout in the brook stopped to read the "Notis" as they sped up the rip-raps on their way to the head-waters of College Swamp. Whether they did or not it mattered little, as the day's sport was all that the heart of dear old Izaac Walton could have desired. With its bright morning atmosphere, its perfume of wood and meadow, with its alternate silence and song, and later in the day

its refreshing showers and exhilarating experiences, it was a day to please the heart of any lover of out-door sport.

The high-road is streaked with long, narrow, muddy spaces and puddles of water from the recent shower; and if I ever longed for wings it is now. Three miles away, straight as the crow flies, overtopping the low woods between, I see the square, hip-roofed farmhouse on the hill, its sharp angular lines hidden and softened by the round-topped elms, its window-panes glowing and flashing like the flames of a conflagration. I am startled for a moment as I watch their bright light, and then I know it is only the caress of the sunset. But I have struck into another old logging-road. The dusk is rapidly falling as I cross its decaying corduroys, still I trudge noiselessly on through the perfumed woodland. What odors of spruce, of pine, of birch-tree, and what fragrance of woodland fern and flower! The new moon has hung its slender horn just over the crest of Kiarsarge, where it overlooks the Conway Intervales; the fire-flies have come out for a romp in the swamp-path which is slowly filling with warm, white-drifting mists. In an hour or two later these trees will be submerged in a sea of dense fog. The whippoorwill "sounds" the pitch, and then comes a burst of melody from every night-bird in the lowland, and the day is over. Out of the woods

at last and up the pasture-side I look back over the quiet scene. The new moon is just dipping behind the White Hills, and a single bright star is following slowly behind. Higher up in the sky the lamps are being lighted, and there is a faint suggestion of the "milky-way," with its broad girdle of starry brilliance. Before me are the lights of the farm, nearer and warmer than those of the sky; its house-doors, thrown wide open to the cool night air, renew their hospitality; and once across their thresholds I am at rest, when rest was never more grateful or enjoyable.

HOMELY SOUNDS.

As if some hand the ivory keys
Of olden times had swept across:
Brought back their subtile harmonies
To emphasize our sense of loss.

HOMELY SOUNDS.

THERE is nothing like the hearing of a stray bird-note, a long-forgotten chord of music, or homely sound familiar in boyhood or youth, to arouse the liveliest of recollections. Each succeeding year finds one farther and farther away from the old landmarks, more and more deeply buried in life's activities, — activities which crowd one day into another with unrelenting swiftness, and which seem never to have an end; an old story, the telling of which is never done; a transformation process, by which the country lad, as generous as his outlook was broad, is rehabilitated and made over into the cool, calculating, bustling merchant, banker, or manufacturer, or into the man whose profession taxes his utmost energies, his broadest capacity, and his courage alike. Men say there is but one groove in which they may run if they are to expect the highest form of success, and so they unconsciously grow to see only themselves and their one ambition. The milestones over which they have so far come are forgotten; only those before them have any charm or interest.

There is a wonderful singleness of purpose in their career. The old-time playmates, grown into manhood like themselves, the old-time scenes of boyish task and romp, are seldom if ever revisited; the days of quaint, homely ways and homespun garb smack too much of sentiment, and are tabooed, put in the garret, stored away with other useless and antiquated associations. Business regards Sentiment as a poor partner; but to my mind, were there more sentimental traits where Nature is concerned, more of the milk of human kindness and human brotherhood in the counting-room, in the bank, at the stock-boards, and on the street, there would be less of dishonesty, less of financial disability, and less of distrust; there would be more of hearty sympathy and less of selfishness. As soon as some begin business for themselves, their hearts begin to ossify; the process of crowding out whatever does not tend to pecuniary gains is perfected so that even the home circle falls within the line of its proscriptions. When humanity is regarded as an unwelcome tenant, when men put it out of their hearts as a landlord does the goods of his delinquent, who is driven into the street homeless and hopeless, then is the world so much the poorer of its manhood. Hard-heartedness, sordid meanness, may make men wealthy in money and lands, but they are poor indeed. Poverty has no meaning deep enough to sound the emptiness of

such living. Man's influence and capacity are not impaired by his having a big heart or for any love he may cherish for Nature in her many guises, for the old homestead and its quaint ways of living, or for his youthful associations, but are the rather strengthened. A man with a soft spot in his bosom, who cannot forget the old red-tiled hearth and its blazing back-log, who yearns for a breath of the hills, who dreams of the bobolink and his song, of windy capes that look far out to sea, and of inland farm with its outlook of undulating verdure, who sighs for an apple from the favorite tree in the ancient orchard, and a moment's rest on the worn threshold in the yellow sunshine, is not less the man for an emergency, or one who is less likely to succeed in his business or profession.

During the day I live in the mid-heart of a great city. Huge blocks of business houses, of brick, granite, and marble, thick with embrasures of decorated lintel and window, of iron pilaster and ornamented frieze, shut the narrow arteries of the town so closely in that only sun and wind dare venture through them, and where sweep on with restless roar vast human tides that are always at their flood. No vesture of green lends its color or shade to cool the heated atmosphere; only the polished pavements, worn slippery with the passing of heavy drays and the tramp of iron-shod hoof, stare ever to the sky. The sun shines into my room through

panes of crystal and falls with mellowed light upon the floor; but that is all of suggestion that comes to me from the outer world, with its fragrant odors, its green fields, and birds whose throats are swollen with dainty song. I sit at my desk with no other thought than of the perplexing questions which men bring to me for solution. I work and delve as laborers do, for hire, and in a realm of abstract principles, as devoid of poetry as the straight line is of beauty. There is a proverb of the profession, that "Law is a jealous mistress," and I have come to believe the saying to be a true one; yet shut Nature out of the house, and slam the door in her face as often as I may, back she comes through every chink and cranny of the heart, only waiting for the magic of some homely sound to call her forth.

Loud and clear above the thunder of the streets, above the beating of the human surf against their walls, comes the clarion challenge of some stray Chanticleer. It comes again and again shrill and clear in the morning air. There is freedom in the note of this barnyard fowl who has by some mischance found his way into these haunts of busy men. There it comes up over the roofs again as breezy as the winds which blow over the lengthy ridgepole where this same Chanticleer has many a time greeted the rosy morn with his rustic note, as lordly, as imperious in its tone, as if all his

numerous harem were there to hear. This crowing of the rooster in his narrow coop somewhere on the street is a signal for a grand transformation scene. The walls of my den fade away into vistas of low walls, broken and gaped, with rows of apple-trees leaning over them white and pink with bloom, and a dusty highway between. The fragrant smell of a glossy-leaved tree, the *Balsamodendron Gileadenses*, haunts the dewy morn; the lilacs in full blossom flash their bright colors in my face from one corner of the lawn. The great doors of the barns are thrown open, and their interiors look cool and inviting. I hear the barn-swallows whistling among the great beams as they play at house-building. Back and forth they fly, first with a straw and then with a mouthful of cement from the roadside-puddle, making the echoes ring among the cobwebs and dust-stained rafters. An old-fashioned house, once yellow, but now faded and worn with sun and storm of two generations, sits above the white line of the road; a broad-topped, wide-limbed elm reaches well out over its low hip-roof, from which rise two huge chimneys, cumbrous affairs, with bricks enough in their red turrets to build a modern house, and in and out of which go and come trooping hosts of the chimney swallow. When a boy, I thought their flights up and down the interior of the chimneys sounded like distant thunder, and many a time has my heart

quaked within me as I heard the dreaded sound in the night. Each year as the summer came around the chimneys had to be burned out, and a wet day was always chosen as a better protection against outside conflagration. The great bundles of straw were tucked into the massive, wide-mouthed fireplaces, and as they were being lighted I would run out of doors to see the hasty flight of black, stubby-looking birds rise from the chimneys, — and what a colony of them there was! Round and round the stacks of soot-stained bricks the swallows circle in graceful, rapid flight, now high, now low, to finally dart down, one after another, straight as a plummet-line, to disappear into the hollows of the square-topped chimneys. The chimney-swift is a bird of motion. I have never seen one of them alight, not even on the threshold of his home; and as dull and sombre-colored as is his feathery coat, without him the old homestead would seem lonesome indeed, when the great fires have burned themselves out in the early spring days. The swift comes with the early summer, and takes his flight away with the coming of the scarlet flame of autumn. His only farewell is in the unusual activity of his gyrations and his increased numbers as the August suns creep down the western skies, and the caverns of brick and clay are silent until another year.

I see a rosy-cheeked woman on the sloping lawn

with a pan of wet corn-meal tucked under her arm. She stirs the meal with an energetic movement, and as she straightens up I see the perfect contour of her figure against the dark background of a wide-open porch-door. She has the pose of a Hebe, leaning slightly back as she does, and might well pass for one of Nature's divinities in her simple beauty and native grace. I hear the sharp staccato rat-tat-tat of her iron spoon against the flaring side of the tin-pan, and a musical call, a bird-like note from the rustic beauty's throat of— "Biddy-biddy-biddy-bid-bid-bid," — beginning with an adagio movement which is accelerated in crescendo to a full, robust tone, to die away in melodious diminuendo away up the scale. A thirty-second note is nowhere. The flock comes from every direction. The hens answer with outspread wings and swift-shod feet; the chicks scarce seem to touch the ground in their hurry; the turkeys roll along like sailors on the land with all their sea-toggery on; and last of all to come to breakfast is lordly Chanticleer. The rooster is Lord High Constable, and he wields his baton with dignity. He is half-human in his attentions to the beauties of his harem. But the breakfast is soon over; and the flock, done with their flurry and scramble about their mistress' feet, scatter themselves among the nodding buttercups and clover of the orchard, or over the broad lawn be-

spattered with the bright yellow disks of the dandelions and sweet honeysuckle. The shadow of a hawk leaves its circle on the grass, and there is a grand rush for shelter amid no slight tumult of gallinaceous clamor, and the silent hawk sails away over the lowlands and meadows, his commonest haunts, only to return at a later day with better success. Reynard has the better luck lying in some hidden ambush for his prey. It is more likely to be the outer skirts of field or pasture, and there is no clamor, for the fox, with ample cunning, performs his work with neatness and despatch; only the feathers lying about the grass or rocks are left to tell the fate of our waylaid favorite. When Reynard is hungry with a long fast he is a brave fellow, going even into the barn-yard and house-garden to take his choice of the flock; but naturally he is a great coward. As the sun goes down at night he comes out on the margin of the woods and barks his discontent with a long-drawn, snappish whine, and as the sound comes up the pasture slope on the wind a murmur of satisfaction runs along the roosts in the sheds; only Chanticleer gets up to listen, and with a soft note he settles again upon the perch, and the heads are quickly stuck under their respective wings, and all are asleep.

Did you ever see a young rooster trying to get the crow out of his throat? His long feathers are a

decoration of the future, and in his ragged, unkempt costume, scarce reaching to his scrawny legs, he mounts the top rail of the fence, if there is one, and makes the supreme effort of his young roosterhood, stretching up so straightly as to almost topple backwards; and what a queer sounding crow it is! The first note is robust enough, but the other notes are weak and uncertain, now thick, now thin, spanning an octave without method or sequence, reminding me of an old acquaintance of my boyhood who seemed never to have his voice under control, but who would bounce the whole gamut in the articulation of a single word. An hour on the top of the fence or woodpile practising a single series of squawks is no unusual diversion for a young rooster. I know of nothing similar for sheer pluck and pertinacity except it be a boy who has just discovered how to pucker his mouth for a whistle, and when the pucker is fairly gotten into shape it stays put for a long interval, and its shrilly pitched discords haunt one dismally indoors and out. The small boy and the small rooster are marked characters in their way, and are not utterly dissimilar in the commoner traits. The small boy is great on noise, so is the rooster. The small boy will straddle the ridge-pole of the barn fearless of danger and admonition, and if that is beyond his reach, a lesser height will do; the rooster is not less ambitious. If you have one of each in the family

you are like to find both at the tip-top of the highest elevation on the premises. But roosters, like boys, attain dignity with age, and though of homely note and noisy guild they are the pride and profit of the farmer. There is no concealment about our Chanticleer; he is honest as the day is long, and as contented and happy as an honest body should be, and when he blows his trumpet all the world may hear and all the world may see. A flock of Brahmas or Plymouth Rocks, like a herd of choice Jerseys, is one of the compensations of the farm, as indispensable to its poetry and charm as is the presence of its girlhood and its robust woman of the household. To dream of the one is to dream of both; but all dreams end, and mine has gone with my Chanticleer of the street.

IN THE WOODS.

O land of beauty, fair to see,
It needs no seer with trained eye,
Or microscopic scrutiny,
To read the truths that underlie
The guise of Nature's purity.

IN THE WOODS.

NATURE is oftentimes of strange, wayward inclination. Like a spoiled child she smiles and pouts in turn; and again, like some wild, untamable creature, she lashes herself into paroxysms of furious wrath. When Dame Nature is aroused with stormy passion, her face is dark with shadow; she pelts the fields with javelins of rain and hail; she rakes the hedges and bending grasses with tempests, and smites the tree-tops with fierce whirlwinds, twisting them into the veriest shreds in her savagery. I have followed the pathway of many a storm by its havoc among the shapely forest-giants, their tops laying low down amid the dwarf growths of cherry and maple, with their wide-reaching roots tipped high up in the air like giant antlers; and what broad gashes they were! I have noticed that when the wind mows a deep swath through the pines a hard-wood growth follows, and there is a streak of warm bright color across the darker belt of evergreens. These seeds of birch, of maple, cherry, and beech must have lain dormant in the black scurf and decayed matter for a long space, waiting

for the coaxing of the sun to break the monotonous bondage of plant-sleep in which the germ lay. Seeds are great travellers. The winds and birds are the common carriers, — the seed-planters of the woods, — and with their assistance the seeds go far from the tree on which they grew and ripened. I have noticed also that trees, like humanity, have the tendency toward gregariousness. They grow up in families; here a clump of hemlocks, there a group of pines; in the lowlands are acres of juniper or hackmatack, and along the dryer portions of the swamps are phalanxes of stalwart spruces, each one as straight as a ship's spar, and much taller. Higher up the slopes are groves of hard-wood growth, each individual species choosing its own soil, growing best where the conditions are most favorable. As I go over the pasture I have noticed an abundance of the American yew, or ground-hemlock, spread out over the slopes, looking like huge green saucers; and over the "stab-and-run" fence in my neighbor's pasture is nothing but scrub-oak by the acre. The birch is the Bohemian of the woods. In swamp or on upland it is equally at home, and I think it the handsomest tree of all; and this is true of either variety, — canoe or yellow. Its white bark, blotched with stains of umber and sienna, its shades of gray and pink, its ruddy-tinted twigs, and long, feathery tassels, its bright-colored leaves, give individuality

and pleasing character to the species. I make my drinking-cups from the bark of this tree, and the cold sparkling water of the mossy-rimmed spring is flavored with its aroma. I reach upwards on its trunk six feet or more, and draw my sharp blade downward toward the ground. I start the outer covering of bark carefully down the length of the gash, and then push outward with hand and arm, and so work around the tree; and I am doing that which the Indian has done so many times before me. I lay the bark in the sun, and the heat rolls it tightly together; and after it has fully seasoned, when the heavy autumn rains have come, and the land-locked salmon have gone up the swollen brook for a night to spawn, I run a stick into my coil of birch-bark, and I have the same sort of a flambeau or torch as the Indian used to make for himself when he went fishing for salmon. It is the same birch of the canoe. It is the tree of Romance. As I lean against the smooth sides of the birch, and look out into the broken vistas of the woods, I seem to see the dusky nomad of the wilderness moving swiftly and stealthily over their checkered floors; I smell the smokes of his evening fires as they drift along on the damp winds; the stroke of his paddle comes up from the stream: but no! it is the red-shirted riverman getting his logs into the boom, and the smoke is that of the fire which has lent its warmth to his dinner. The ring of the axe is a human sound.

It is in the woods that I find the most perfect repose in nature. The trees are Earth's natural covering, with which she concealed her primeval nakedness from man, and within which she even now strives to hide the rare perfection of her vegetable processes, her reduplications of lichen, plant, and tree, her animal life with all its brute unrestraint and inherited instinct, and her bird-life in all its charm of song and wild abandon. The limpid waters of lake and stream, the untrodden freshness of nooks and leafy dells, fill the measure of the fascination of the woods. A June day under the brawny, wide-limbed beeches, their network of smaller branches hidden by dainty arabesques of leaves unfolding to the sun, when the mossy knolls and hollows beneath are strewn with broken shafts of sunshine, with here and there a cluster of violets whose soft colors were surely stolen from the sky, — is a feast for the gods. All about me are fallen logs in all stages of decay, and on the tops and sides of which grow in profusion scarlet, cream-colored, and spotted fungi, so soft and tender that their thick stems break at the touch of the hand, the most beautiful of which are the *Agaricas comatus* and the *Boletus edulis*. Lichens grow luxuriantly upon the beech, and some of them are very beautiful. No more delicate colors are found in the woodland than in these flowerless plants.

In the open places, where the ground is moist, I

find some fine specimens of marestail, and always several varieties of delicate ferns. In the woods the springs are not far apart, and from one to windward come familiar scents of spearmint and of peppermint, which when in blossom are not unlikely to be plucked by some diligent gatherer of herbs and hung in pendent bunches, beside the long sprays of the garden catnip, from the stained rafters of some farmhouse garret. In June the summer is in its period of adolescence; the woods are newly clad in a garb which is soon to grow rusty and faded with too much sun. How eagerly I follow the making of these summer garments! No sooner has the snow thawed from the slopes than I have discovered that the tips of the limbs and tender sprouts have begun to redden with the rushing upward of the rich saps. The ice has gone out of the river, and I watch the willows on its banks to get a glimpse of the first catkin; the willow and birch catkins come earliest, and troops of merry children scour the river-banks and runs for the velvety pom-pons of the former; the rock-maples, the sugar trees of New England, grow ruddy in the pastures and along the margins of the woods. The oaks of the uplands, the red, yellow, and white, of which the latter is the most tardy, are the last to dress in green, and their leaf is the broadest, toughest, and richest, in its royal purple, of them all. The fluffy blossoms of the

elm, the favorite of the village highway, follow closely after the catkins, and when they drift down on the wind I know that the foliage of the elm will soon cast its welcome shadows across the white dusty street. When the leaves begin to grow the song-birds begin to build, the robin in the homely old apple-tree, the oriole in the swaying boughs of the elm, to rock with every breeze that blows, the sparrow selects the tall ferns or the flowering thorn of the pasture, the blossoms of which are as white as driven snow, the swallow begins to frequent the puddles of the highway, and makes many a journey thence to the barn, the bobolink, with his inimitable song and hilarious glee, his gay coat glistening in the bright sunlight as he scours the clover-fields or flies from tree to tree, playing the gallant to Mrs. Robert, ending his love-strain with

"Bob-o-link, bob-o-link,
Spink, spank, spink,
Chee, chee, chee!"

selects the waving grasses of the smooth mowing-lands about the tall black-cherry trees on the tip-top of the farm or in the meadows as his base of operation; and what a madcap he is! the yellow-hammer finds a hollow tree and bores his doorway through the soft, decaying wood, where he immediately sets up housekeeping, the bluebirds have taken all the tenements in the old martin-house

on the shed, and all the world is agog with melody. I see all these birds in the woods at times, but I have never seen the hermit-thrush or wood-thrush or the whipporwill on the higher uplands. The cuckoo wanders from lowland to upland and back again throughout the summer, but, like the thrush and whipporwill, he is a shy fellow and does not often show himself to strangers. If ever mortals reach Elysium, they will find plenty of trees and birds I have no doubt. It would not be Elysium without them, for of all delightful places on earth none are more so than the quiet, sleepy dreamlands of the forests.

When the leaves are gone with the autumn winds, we get into closer companionship with the trees. Their graceful lines show clearly against the hillsides or the sky. It is with them as if the drapery had fallen from the nude ideal of the sculptor, and left it standing in all its native and unadorned beauty. The once round, massy tops have lost their mystery; only the dark evergreens, the pines, hemlocks, and spruces, and the thicker firs, reaching upward to the sky through the clear atmosphere, are still inscrutable, only they disdain to tell us of their secret of cro'nest and eyry hidden in their gloomy tops. Even in winter the bare woods do not seem cold and barren to me, though their stout roots are deeply buried in the snows. The lichens, which thrive so luxuriantly in sum-

mer, now gleam more brightly in vari-colored spots up and down the trunks of the trees, and enliven their gray coverings with suggestions of rich, warm tones. These are always found on the southerly sides of the trees, and are as good as the needle of the compass to pilot one through their wastes. The sunny sides of the scrub-pines and firs are warm and cosey places, though the winds blow bleakly over the snowy levels, and close under their scraggy trunks the bright reds and purples of the checkerberry, tufts of evergreen, looking like splashes of *terre-vert* against the warm, brown needles beneath, and the glossy-leaved arbutus peeps kindly out from under the margin of the white coverlet of the snow. The woods are always beautiful, and to myself they are typical of the highest form of natural beauty, in winter and summer alike, and have abundant charm. They are full of character in winter, and break the monotony of the white fields; they shelter the low, drooping eaves of the old red farmhouse from the cutting winds and sleet, and make weird music in the silences of the winter night, sweeter than any I have ever heard elsewhere. They were the lullabys of my childhood, and I have never forgotten them.

Speaking of lichens, I remember of once travelling on Cape Cod on a late winter day, and stepping from the train at the depot of one of its shore towns, of seeing some of the finest specimens on

the elms and stone-walls I had ever met with. On the elms there were spots of lichen-growth as broad as a man's body and of the color of saffron, and on the walls by the road were luxuriant masses of them in four colors. I had not time to examine them, but I thought it the finest winter display I had seen. Never do the silvery ribbons and spangles of the yellow birch look so transparent or appear to such advantage as in the sunlight of a crisp winter day.

I sometimes take a day's outing in the woods when the snows are deepest. Spread over the leaves is this great table-cloth of dimity, and strewn from one end to the other with seeds and cones of the trees, veritable crumbs Nature has dropped for the chickadees who hop over the snow, looking like white puff-balls, lunching here and there as unconscious of my intrusion as they well can be. A whitish-brown rabbit leaps into sight, and setting up straightly on his hinder legs takes a good look at me and then goes on into the deeper woods. I have disturbed a partridge in her burrowing-place in the snow, and she whirrs away into the pine thickets. The owls make frequent midday flights, that are as noiseless as the footsteps of a ghost. They are the ghosts of the woods, the wood-birds and squirrels give them a wide berth. How soundless the woods at noon in winter. The chickadees have gone to sleep in the sun, and only the low

creak of a limb in the wind overhead or the deep bass rumbling of the ice on the pond, as it heaves and swells in the throes of the winter frost, — only these disturb the dreamer. But the sun is getting low, for the winter afternoons go swiftly when one is busy with his thoughts or avocation, and I go out of the growing shadows of the woods homeward to my open fire, to see my woods again in the leaping, crackling flame. It is only at nightfall the woods seem dreary, dark, and lonesome-like, when their branches spread out like veins of ink against the cold, gray tones of a winter sunset, when the keen north-wind blows over the hills and down the valleys with a breath whose touch is like the brand of a hot iron. But if the winter woods are beautiful, under the bright, sunny skies of June they become realms of enchantment, with their delicate odors, their over-arching foliage, their soft carpetings of laurel, wood-fern, and partridge-plum, of white-petalled wind-flower, and other varieties of plant-life. One can well say with Bryant, —

> "The groves were God's first temples,—
> God's ancient sanctuaries."

SCARE-CROWS.

Flawless the heart that owns a simple creed
Built to the plummet-line of human need;
No slave to idle form or strait-laced sect,
Content to speak Truth's common dialect;
Whose garb is not the thin, worn-out veneer
Of moral pretence, specious or austere,
But owns the attribute that underlies
True worth and manly Christian sacrifice.

SCARE-CROWS.

FREQUENTLY, in the early summer, I find myself driving along the country highways, past sleepy-looking farm-houses, more somnolent than ever under the growing stress of field-work, and the thick, softly-falling shadows of the dooryard elms and maples, — so silent and deserted, with all the children at school and all the noisy, cackling flocks afield busily hunting grub and grasshopper. At intervals along the road the district schoolhouse leans its stained boards and diminutive window-panes against the birches and scarlet sumac of the roadside, and just above the window's narrow sill I catch a glimpse of frowzy heads and rosy cheeks, of craned necks of boys and girls, who peer uneasy-like out into the sunshine, longing no doubt for the recess or noon-hour, which seems ever far away to the school-urchin.

I remember years ago seeing by the roadside an old deserted schoolhouse, with its unpainted, weather-beaten, creaky door, hung by a single butt to the pine lintel, hacked and scarred by many a boyish blade, half-open and leaning helplessly in

over a worn threshold, across which the winter and summer storms beat without restraint. The snow and rain and the sunbeams were the only tenants of this ruin. Its decay touched my heart as do the gray hairs and tottering footsteps of the village patriarch, and the vandalism of time seemed a fitter fate than the vandalism of man. Stranger though its threshold was to my boyish feet, this low-roofed, blackened building was a hive of traditions to many a grown-up boy, and like the humming of the bees it sang of bygone days in many a homely phrase and pleasant memory; nor was it difficult for me to people its empty desks with dwellers, to conjure up the sibilant speech of birchen switch, — that scare-crow of relentess vigilance, though innocent enough when flaunting its tawny bloom by the wayside.

What a brood of reminiscences comes as I glance through the doorway to where a broad beam of sunlight falls athwart the sagging floor, so strangely silent and lonesome, and so well described by our favorite poet:

"Within, the master's desk is seen,
Deep scarred by raps official;
The warping floor, the battered seats,
The jack-knife's carved initial;
The charcoal frescoes on the wall;
Its door's worn sill, betraying
The feet, that creeping slow to school,
Went storming out to playing."

A homely description to be sure, but full to the brim of that pathos which lingers longest in the heart. But there came another picture :

I saw where points a gilded vane ;
Where, dusky-red against the wood
With shattered sash and window-pane,
The old-time district schoolhouse stood.
Hedged in with birch and hackmatack,
Beside the highway's dusty track,
Its threshold friendless, thistle overgrown,
And all its dreams of childish romance flown.

Where idly swings an open door
As years ago, when orchard bloom,
Blown inward o'er its desk and floor,
Distilled for me a rare perfume;
Along whose dingy, crackled walls
The mellow sunlight slanting falls;
Where sped the scant three months of winter school,
That served alike for bookish lad and fool.

So in mid-revery I drive through still woods to catch an occasional drowsy note or sound, and down through the hollows, over rattling plank bridges, where the sun gets only furtive glances at the shallows and ripples of the water beneath, and up along the slopes where glisten bits of bright tin scraps, whirling and bobbing in the wind, as they hang pendent from a score or two of leaning poles amid-field, and round about which is a network of cotton twine, strung to a hundred stakes

low down among the sprouting blades of corn, and in the centre of all is posed the deity of the acre, with legs a-straddle and arms outreaching as stiffly as their wooden sinews will permit, with old battered hat pulled low over an expressionless visage of unkempt straw, wrapped about in such garments as would dub our scare-crow a disciple of Lord Tatters. What human ingenuity can invent of ugliness out of castaway clothing has been made into this perfect tramp. I have helped to build many a tramp of the cornfield, and it is no wonder to myself that the cunning crow has been so easily deceived. When the leaves of the oak have grown to the size of a mouse's ear the farmer bestirs him to plant the Indian-corn. The brown slopes have been ploughed and cross-ploughed, harrowed and reharrowed, until the soil is as light and mellow as meal from the mill; across the acre, from one end to the other, old Dobbin has dragged the light furrowing-plough, forward and back, back and forward, until the whole field looks as if a comb with huge teeth had been drawn through the moist, warm dirt, and where later in the season will stand the stout ranks of waving corn. Over the brown earth go the women-folks of the household, with their dropping of the precious seed, of golden kernel, of bean, and silver disk of pumpkin, and after them come the men with broad-bladed hoe to cover-in the sowing of the dainty-fingered maid and housewife.

How anxiously the crows scan the laborers their frequent flights bear witness as they hover among the thick-set apple-trees of the orchard, giving vent to their satisfaction with spasmodic laughter, but our black carrion scavenger has reckoned without his host, for ere the morning dawns the ragged guardsman is at his post, and the crow still hovers among the orchard trees or about the margin of the neighboring woodland, pouring out his discontent upon the winds. Sometimes the farmer, do as best he can, finds his acre robbed of its seed to the half of its planting only to retaliate by robbing the nest of the robber and hoisting his prey of dead crow aslant the sunbeams of the cornfield. This done the crows give over their filching until fall, when the yellow corn-shocks lend their fatness to delay the migrations of these pests of the seed-time. One does not have to search the cornfields for dummies and scare-crows. Men find their neighbors setting them up everywhere, and if I remember rightly, the church of a half a century ago had its share. The beliefs of my boyhood were of the most rugged sort, bordering upon asceticism so far as any reasonable pleasure or diversion came in question, and the grim philosophy of redemption of those days kept the scare-crow of Fear always in sight. It may be well supposed that Orthodoxy came naturally by its stern, exacting, angular character. The Puritans,

as Emerson said, thrust Beauty out of the meeting-house, and shut the door in her face. If there was a bleak, windy spot in the settlement, there the infant church household was planted, with a creed as barren of natural beauty as the edifice wherein God was supposed to have taken up his abode, and whose walls rang more with denunciation than with the welcome tidings of peace and love to men.

I have noticed that religion of one sort and another — for like lichens growing up and down the trunks of the trees and along the rough faces of the boulders in the fields, there are many kinds — makes some people very intolerant of their neighbor's behavior on Sundays as well as on week-days. When a ten-year-old urchin, I every Sabbath walked some four miles over a dusty, hilly road to the old white meeting-house on the Hill to gratify the orthodox ideas of my parents, but whether I derived that benefit which was expected of my strict training my trainers know best. If there were any lack in a spiritual growth, I can testify truthfully that there was no lack in a muscular development. The old church interior, made up of hard, unyielding lines, with a high pulpit facing the singers, was rich in suggestion of an unrelenting Deity. The pews were marvels of discomfort, with their straight backs and narrow seats, and, young as I was, I was ex-

pected to keep my eye on the minister, and to be able to repeat a week hence both forenoon and afternoon texts, as an evidence of my spiritual improvement and precocity.

Conscience, whetted to a razor-edge, cut everything that touched its glittering blade. It was the scare-crow in the shrunk acre of Sense. Every wish of the heart must be filed and docketed with the clerk of that Court of Spiritual Monopolies, Conscience, where by a process of special pleading it was decided where duty ended and diversion began. Wide-awake day and sleepy night were alike haunted by numberless spooks of condemnation, indefinable organisms that like motes wavered up and down in the atmosphere of the soul, making perpetual havoc with childhood's day-dreams and fancies. It was a strange existence for the boy who grew unconsciously into the staidness of manhood, and whose counterpart was in almost every household. Public opinion as regarded church-going was a Force. As for the men of those days, he who made any pretension to respectability and influence in affairs attended church with his family regularly, — a devout custom which has much relaxed in later years, — but they who wandered about their farms or lounged indolently within the drowsy shadows of their orchard trees, were unspiritual vagabonds, men hardened in worldliness and sinful neglect, — a state

then regarded as truly lamentable, but now regarded with more leniency.

Though a boy, I listened with great seriousness to the discourse of my elders, as we trudged homeward over the hills from church, concerning the spiritual fate of those men whom we might see any Sunday in the fields or in the shadows of the elms in the lowlands, and one could but note the unctuous conceit of my companions as they contemplated the certainty of their own salvation, and consigned their less devout fellows to the questionable mercies of the Devil; as if God lived altogether in a meeting-house, and in their own in particular! But creeds and personal beliefs have changed with the swift advance of thought, and dogmas that once cried themselves hoarse in the battle of theologic idiosyncrasies have at last died of senility or exhaustion. Men have at last come to believe that no structure of human handiwork, of human conception for the indwelling of the Deity, no matter how solemnly consecrated, takes any sanctity other than from the worship of its people. The home of the humblest workingman may have more of divinity within its kitchen walls than the noblest pile of church architecture. The hand of man has no especial virtue. Everything is prepared for the higher intelligence which is his. He adds nothing to what has been given him, but Nature is mutilated to serve man's arti-

ficiality; but Nature indemnifies herself for all his vandalism of saw-mill, of river-dam, of factory, and of town. Nothing is proof against the tax which Nature levies on all the exaltation of mankind. No man has a right to question his neighbor's Christianity. The outward measure which men take of each other, whether they worship God in the richly upholstered pews that border the broad aisle of the fashionable church, or whether they hold their communion with the Creator, under the blue vaults of the church which the Creator built for himself, filled with His sunshine, among the trees, on the green knolls, where the winds blow fresh from the gardens of the woods and mountains, and where the choirs are of feathered songsters, is not the measure which God writes in the Great Book. I have a great admiration for every-day religion, such as men carry as they do their dinner-pails, and from which men draw humanity, and upon which they build up strong, virile manhood and hearthood; but of the kind which people hang up in their closets with their Sunday clothes, when Sunday is over, I have very little sympathy or respect. Religion never thrives upon a field thick-set with lifeless images or dummy scare-crows of particular rewards and punishments. Cant differs greatly from a tender, loving Christian service; for the sanctity with which God wraps himself about finds no expression in the long-drawn, distorted

visages and quasi-devout phrases of some of his offspring. Loyalty to God, like a woman's loyalty to her tea-kettle, stands for commonplace uses and daily application. Rafters, cobwebs, and glaring frescoes take no semblance of the overarching blue which roofs in the cloisters of Nature. Structures of wood and stone may gratify human vanity, may appease human longings where they are sufficiently shallow; creeds may hold them together; but the Builder of the Universe is above creed or people.

John Ruskin says no picture should be painted unless it has an outlook, a vista, out through which one is led into the Beyond; that no interior should be painted utterly closed in, but there should be a door ajar on its lintel, or a window looking out upon a bit of blue sky, so that the imagination may have some scope for activity. Few men dispute the immortality of the soul, for, through such belief they look up through the wonders of creation to the Creator. The lover of Nature must, of a truth, be a worshipper at God's altars. Touch a single key of the piano, and the harp which stands beside it will respond in perfect sympathy, but only that string of the harp which accords with the note of the piano will answer with its vibration. Men who are in sympathy with the great Tone constantly sounding throughout Nature will find their hearts unconsciously thrilled with a willing unison of purpose and de-

sire, unconsciously answering its subtile harmonies, unconsciously obedient to the Infinite Hand which has so wonderfully laid the foundations of the grand cathedrals of the woods and mountains. The woods are filled with hosts of unseen worshippers, the mountains with countless altars whose smokes of incense are the white morning mists which lie so lightly along the tree-tops, hiding the battlements of gray, turreted stone and filling the skies with fleecy clouds. The leaping waters that jar the firmly-set rocks, the feet of the ever-rising domes, with their tumult and deep reverberations, make the heavy diapason to which all other sounds are attuned. Nature's grand melodies are ever pitched upon the same key-note. Nature knows no discord. From ocean depth and roar of breaking surf to the light treble of the shallows of the mountain brooklet the harmony is sustained and its rendering is faultless. God sounds the key-note in many a subtile touch of color, tone, and form, animate and inanimate, and wherever he finds a responsive heart there he finds a willing worshipper. "Behold the lilies," said the Great Preacher.

RAINY DAYS.

Hear the footsteps of the rain!
Pitter, patter,
Tuneful chatter,
On the flashing fire-lit pane.
Hear the honeysuckle creak
As the winds its secrets seek,
Twisting through its matted vines.
And the windows, how they rattle, bang, and batter!
Pitter, patter,
Dripping chatter,
Tripping down the shingled roof,
Filling in its liquid woof;
How the notes each other throng,
Making up their slumber-song,
Full of softly drowsy lines,
With their drip, and rush, and gush and clatter!
Pitter, patter,
Dripping chatter,
Hear the night-tide of the rain!

RAINY DAYS.

THERE are wet-weather philosophers and dry-weather philosophers, each after his imaginations and each having his own idiosyncrasies, his own conjectures of the utility or necessity of the dripping rain, with its concomitants of muddy highways and wayside brooklets, with its dark, lowering storm-clouds, its dense fogs and damp, inrolling sea-mists, its leaky roofs and balky chimneys that persist in drawing the wrong way or not at all, with its out-of-door discomforts, its enforced inaction, its worry and fret of interrupted labor of field or farm. Every dog has its day, and so has the rain, and for all its disturbance of human plans or pleasures it makes ample compensation by its re-enforcement of the economies of Nature. Nature is the perfect economist. Nothing is ever lost to her.

Storms come and go, always obedient to the Unseen, whose higher, broader purposes are too often but imperfectly understood by the dwellers of earth. Man plans for days; Nature speaks of eternity. Nature is never a borrower, but always

a lender, a usurer in the greater sense, exacting a sacrifice for every service she renders, emptying the skies of their superabundant wet or moisture upon the thirsty ground, to withdraw it again in slow rising mists to be carried far away, to be again poured out upon other fields and forests. A rainy day is a blessing to men as to plants and trees, the fields and woods, and there is a zest in the down-pouring rain, the slow draining of the clouds, which leaves earth the richer in promise than before its coming. What is more delightful than with broad-brimmed tarpaulin and water-proof coat and boots to stand out in the clearing or to wander in the woods or meadows when the big drops come chasing down the sky, — a flood of crystal wet, whipping the brooks and puddles into thick foam, beating their soft reveille upon the leaves of the trees, making the clover blossoms drunk with satiety, and filling the cups of the garden-flowers to the brim with sweet nectar! The falling of the rain on the roof, its drip-drip among the vines that hide the weather-stains on the old farmhouse, its low-voiced monody as it beats against the windows are idyllic sounds. A rainy day is one of Nature's poems set to the charming rhythm of dripping tree-tops and of noisy, babbling streams.

The roads have grown white under the ardent glances of the summer sun; the trees by the road-

side, the shapely shrubbery and arbor-vitæ of the hedges, have put on the dusty coat of the miller, the mulleins in the pasture have the look of thirsty wayfarers along the margins of the broad ledges, the leaves of the fragrant-scented sweet-ferns have the warm brown color of autumn, with so much of sunshine and so little of dew, the lichens along the walls and fences are shrunken and dried up with scarcity of drink, and look old and faded, and the corn-leaves are as tightly curled as the paper lamplighters I used to make in boyish amusement before the days of brimstone matches, when it was an unwished-for episode to have the hearth grow fireless and cold amid its gray heap of scattered, dying embers.

The dry, silent days have grown monotonous; the birds have lost voice; only the shrill, arid music of the cicada, the sharp, disturbed snapping of grasshopper wings, as one wanders about the discouraged fields, breaks the monotony of quiet. How patiently the field-flowers wait, with upturned faces, for the coming of the rain! Night after night the sun has gone down behind the far-off hills, a ball of fire; but all things end, and so does a spell of dry weather. To-day the cuckoo has been singing in the lowlands all the long forenoon,

"Cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!"

his swift-recurring notes ending always with a

falling inflection; the swallows, from dawn to twilight, have been wheeling and skimming above the green carpet of the fields, darting in and out, up and down, over and through the trees of the orchard, and toward sundown the robins in the swamp maples have been saying, with a sort of musical intonation,

> "Tilopy, tilopy, tolopy, toplady, toplady,
> Tut-tut-tut,"

whistling rain to the gray clouds in the west that have at last hidden the hot sun. There is a trace of the coolness of the woods which comes up over the slopes with the south-wind. There is a strange, uncomfortable moisture in the air and about the face and hands, a rawness in the atmosphere which is a sure monition of coming wet. The frogs in the water-grass by the river croak their satisfaction in a dismal sort of way. Sounds come from a great distance with marvellous distinctness, and seem near at hand. Unconsciously we mark their individuality of voice, the sharp concussion of hammer, and the closing of door.

The stream is like a mirror, with only an occasional ripple as the wind freshens from the sea, blurring the sharp lines and angles of the house-tops and red chimneys and the shapely domes of the elms scattered along its banks, of the black, disused wharves and low, tumble-down warehouses,

which mark the upper limits of the old fishing-town, so faithfully reproduced in the inverse upon the dusky, azure sky, delicately painted upon the river's surface. The lights of the vessels come out one by one amid their rigging and slender spars, which stand out sharply against the narrow streak of darkening gray above the hills. The house-lights follow those of the river, the fishing-sloops and schooners, so lonesome and silent amid-stream, like answering signals, and reach down into the depths of the waters with tremulous arms of fire. The woods grow black and stark along the uplands, and over all hangs a single star, while wraiths of wet sea-fog roll in over the narrow bay and blow up stream, and behind which the dimly-gleaming lights play at hide-and-seek. A lonely whippoorwill fills the woods with plaintive echoes, the far-away hoot of an owl fills in the bass with a deep, sepulchral note. The frogs have not yet done their croaking, but the winds are rising higher, and the tree-tops moan and make weird songs ; the vines rattle about the windows, and the air is filled with uncanny speech. The rain is coming. The Spirit of the Clouds is passing over, and the world is silent at last. It is the prelude of the storm, the dumb presage of the dripping winds.

The lights go out along the highways, and the fireflies hang gleaming lamps in the tall wet grass, that blink and glisten in the dark like far-off stars,

and with bedtime we creep up the narrow, creaky stair to our rest under the low rafters of the old farmhouse, where the boys have always slept since its roof-tree was planted; but ere the midnight hour there come pattering rain-footsteps, lightsome like, on the moss-grown roof, a tapping of wet fingers on the garret windows in the peaked gable. A feathered watcher in the chimney has caught the lullaby of the storm, and wakes his family of swallows to hear the news; and what a cavernous uproar they make for the moment! The prelude of the sounding rain along the matted tops of the woods comes in through the half-raised window, and, few moments later, there is a rush of storm-sprites across the fields and up over the eaves and through the swaying elms that overtop the smokeless chimneys; and we again lapse into slumber, to dream of meadows white with bloom, of brooks and singing shallows and speckled trout, of wet, dripping woods, of fragrant pines and silver mists. O the magic of the rain! O for the youth whose sleep was never so sound as when the besom of the storm swept the hills and vales of childhood, pulling all the stops in the great organ of Nature wide open; and what grand, soulful music of the upper skies came down to dwell for a day in the hearts of men!

"I shut my eyes, and see as in a dream
The friendly clouds drop down spring violets

> And summer columbines, and all the flowers
> That tuft the woodland floor, or overarch
> The streamlet: spiky grass for genial June,
> Brown harvests for the waiting husbandman,
> And for the woods a deluge of fresh leaves,"

and for the heart of man a sweet, refreshing rest. But life is not all of poetic imaginings, nor is a wet day all of tripping, dripping rain-measures and rain-songs to the farmhouse. It sends the men to the blacksmith with the unshod horses and broken tools, or to the miller with a grist, and from thence to the village store for an hour's chat with a score of other farmers who have come down to the village smithy or to the mill upon similar errands. I have very vivid recollections of the rainy-day rides to the village with the wagon set up high on its thoroughbrace springs, made of thicknesses of sole-leather, and piled full of leathern bags filled with corn and wheat; and of myself perched atop of all with a hugh blue umbrella to keep off the wet. It was a good long ride through the woods and over the hills, and I well remember the drenched look of everything as we went on our way, and especially of the bushes where the rain torrents had washed the leaves and soil from their roots, leaving them brown and bare. I had always to walk up the hills, which was as much a principle of humanity as any other which was taught me

in my boyhood; and it was a welcome sound to drive across the narrow plank-bridge at the head of the mill-pond, for there I got a glimpse of the old brown clap-boarded grist-mill, whose muffled song of whirring, whirling stones had ever a great charm for me. The miller was a little weazened, dried-up old man, most silent withal; and between his huge quid of tobacco and his perpetual fumbling of the meal hot from the stones, his taking toll and his monosyllabic utterances, he seemed to be a species of dusty-coated automata. Not the least of my boyish interest and curiosity was aroused as I watched the endless leather belt with its tiny cups of tin filled to the brim with the yellow grains of the crushed corn that a moment before went into the big hopper to slowly trickle down into the centre of the great burr-stones; and how swiftly the tin cups chased each other up the square wooden spout to come down on the opposite side to be emptied through a wooden run into the bag tied to its nozzle! It was a boyish wonderment of mine how the meal was so deftly gotten into these cups; but one dull day I caught the miller "picking" his stone, and it was a secret no longer. Not far off was the smithy, and I could catch the sound of its ringing hammer marking time with almost perfect rhythm above the whir of the dusty miller's grinding. The miller and the smith had both of them

cosey nooks for their work-dwellings,—one beside the highway and the other above the cool, brimming flumes of the stream which shone always by day like liquid emerald.

'Twixt the planted lands and clover bloom
Adown the steep of the village hill,
Past clustered gable and sloping roof
Runs the broad highway to stream and mill.
The smithy stood just across the road,
Beside it a larch-tree swung aloft
Its brawny branches in storm and sun,
To make in the summer the robin's croft.

Heigh-ho, a blow, and the anvil rings
With a clink, clank, and the ruddy brand
Throws far and wide its fiery hail
As the smith lets fall his good right hand;—
A freakish, fidgety, raw-boned man,
With silvery hair and wrinkled face,
Whose nose was built on so spare a plan
His spectacles scarce could keep their place.

I see him now, as in childhood days,
Sorting old iron beside his door,—
A score of shoes on the pegs arow,
The cobwebbed rafters and slivered floor.
The rickety bellows wheeze and blow,
Then the sea-coal forge-fire burns up clear,
The metal 's aheat with white-hot glow,—
Clink, clank, clink the noisy song I hear.

Like the gray horse in the pictures of a certain Flemish artist, there was ever a vagabondish-

looking urchin squatted close under the sagging rail, on the outer edge of the river bridge, with heels dangling over the water, fishing with crooked alder-pole, such as I myself had cut many a time,— trout seemed ever to have a partiality for a homely alder-rod in those days! — and such as one sees by the side of the meadow-brooks as you get to the woods, where it has been thrown by the rustic angler as he has turned his footsteps homeward. What hosts of conjectures come with the glimpse of one of these cast-away fishing-poles, cut from the alder-swamp by some angler on his way to the meadows, half hidden in the tall grass, looking somewhat like a water-snake of extraordinary size; but I am ever full of conjecture as to what its owner was like, and whether he had any sort of luck. This urchin always eyed me with a sort of lazy askance, and bobbed his hook patiently amid a school of indifferent chub and perch, — their heads all to the current, so motionless within the shadows of the logs which choked the narrow channel of the mill-pond, the play-ground of the more venturesome village lads. In eastern Maine I have many a time seen the country women and lassies crossing the Penobscot river upon the "drives" of spruce and pine which had come from the forests far inland, going over them as unconscious of danger apparently as if they had been a highway of corduroy well set in terra firma. Eastward lay

the broad expanse of the pond outlet which fed the mill-stream in drouth and wet, and above its rocky margin towered the pine-clad dome of Quito Mountain, every tree and rock of which were photographed in these crystal waters below with every still morning; but on rainy days only the slaty color of roughened waters is seen with never a hint of mountain or sky; only the commotion of thick-falling drops, the buffetings of gusty winds which drive the flying spray over the sandy ruts of the low shore road are here. How much there is to see between the down-falling drops of bright enlivening tones of gray, red, and yellow and dun-hued mosses on tree and rock and fence, of pasture shrub and woodland as full of vigorous, charming color as a boy's face fresh from a cold bath, the rainy-day philosopher will tell you.

On the farm the rainy day is a day of odds and ends of labor, — of mending yokes and harnesses and of making ready for the haymakers, of cobbling the children's shoes, and of aiding the housewife here and there indoors. There was ever enough to do; but when the round of small work was completed, it was a day of lounging about the open fire which has been started in the dingy brick fireplace, where the fire has burned so many winter evenings brightly through, to take off the damp chill of the storm and not less to abate the sombre-

ness of the lurking indoor shadows, and when the housewife hums lightly to the music of her spinning-wheel, whirling it back a bit, and then round and round in the warm blaze of the glowing hearth, —

> "A farmer's work is from sun to sun,
> But a woman's work is never done."

It was considered rather an accomplishment for the farm-boy to be able to make a good "waxed-end," to draw an even thread, and to drive a peg without splitting or breaking it. The old shoe-bench was one of the romances of the household, and afforded me in my earlier years an unfailing source of amusement. It sat out in the old well-room, and never have I been by it in later years,— for the same old bench is there still! — but I stop to take a draught from the old hemlock well-curb opposite it; and what a magic there is in its crystal depths to bring back the recollections of far-off days! As abundant romance clustered, by way of many an association, about the old black lap-stone which had come down from long-gone generations, and which I used to get out on winter nights, and upon which I would crack a dish of butternuts by the firelight. The broad-faced shoe-hammer was the favorite for this firelight pastime, but it was with hesitation that its owner loaned it to the children for such idle usage. Its generous-hearted proprietor has been laid to rest with his

ancestors in the hillside burying-ground, but the old shoe-bench, the lapstone, the clumsy wooden clamps, and the old black knee-strap, are in their accustomed places, — silent, yet full of olden story. As I think of them I can see a quiet farmhouse, its outer walls white as snow in the summer sunlight, its bright green blinds closed to temper the summer heat which falls so prone upon the lowlands at the foot of the orchard-slopes. Across its narrow threshold is the domain of homely comfort and of ideal country living. It is past noon; the dinner has been "cleared away," and a dreamy stillness, akin to its wide fireplace and high wainscoted walls, has settled over the house affairs. The old clock has just struck its two strokes past midday, and ticks away in sober fashion after its wont, sounding loud in the drowsy silence of the summer afternoon. The master is taking his well-earned nap, his face well covered with a bandanna of generous dimensions. The sun lies broadly over the pasture, with its narrow cape of pines reaching out from the swamp-lands. The song-birds are hardly yet awake for their afternoon recital, and the low hum of the honey-bees, whose homes lie just within the shadows of the old Nonsuch apple-trees, is hardly more than a suggestion of sound. A passing team up the white line of the road breaks the monotony of this pastoral dreamland. Farther up the hill is the square house,

old fashioned, with low hip-roof, its bright-red chimneys overtopping the dark foliage of the trees which cluster about it; and below, marking the line of the meadows, is a trail of azure, the mere suggestion of a summer mist. Nothing lives in the heart of the true man or woman like the sweet memories of the old homestead; for

"Be it ever so humble, there 's no place like home," —

no recollections so tender, so heart-touching, as of the days of childhood.

When we were not off to the miller's or to the smithy, we had other and abundant means of hastening the going of these rainy days. When we had rummaged the attic and the old shed chambers to our heart's content, for the thousandth time in search of something new, we would betake ourselves to the barn. The barn could tell many secrets of boyish mischief, but we were never tired of its fragrant hay-mows, the wild leaps from its broad beams, or our boyish clamberings over the low scaffolds after the nests of the loud-cackling hens. Their noisy clamor was always the signal for a hunt, and we used to wonder that they could not keep their secret better. I can never forget the strange sensations of my first leap from the great beams! My breath seemed to be leaving me forever. I seemed to be flying through unbounded space; but upon emerging from the loose hay

beneath it was only to repeat the enchanting pastime. I remember of my barn exploits my first detected game of "high, low, jack," played with some of the boys from a neighbor's on the high seat of the old-fashioned thoroughbrace wagon, and how father caught me in the act. Cards were tabooed at the house, as they were commonly in those days of strict orthodoxy, and all my playing had been so far of a clandestine character. I expected a severe reproof, but instead of that came the quiet suggestion: "Boys, if you must play cards, you will find a good fire and plenty of welcome at the house." We were thunderstruck at such evidence of heresy, and the raciness of the adventure was gone at once; the cards were put up, and we began anew our vaulting from the dim shadows of the roof. The keen edge of our pleasure in that direction was forever gone, forever dulled. What noisy fluttering and disquietude was there among the swallows that had built their homes of mastic under the rafters of the barn interior; what silvery bars of dust stretched slanting downward from its wall; but in the bright summer sunshine these

> Shadow-haunted barns
> Shot through and through with creviced gold,
> Their broad beams hung with knotted yarns
> That spiders spin, ancestral mould,
> Adorned with many a quaint design

> Of filmy, geometric line,
> With scented mows, and ample, clean-swept floors
> Of Norway pine within their wide-thrown doors,

are charming places to dream away the lagging hours of afternoon. No bed of down is now so restful as the "scented mows" of the cool barn shadows seemed in those far-off days. It is a different place, when the threshers have set up their machine, when its sweet atmosphere is clogged and choked with the thickest of stifling dust; but even the threshing was full of anticipated interest for the youngsters.

On rainy days we often went from the sports of the old weather-stained barn to the woods and meadows. What zest of trouting comes with the rain, and what charming pictures, what rich, gray harmonies of color come and go with the lifting or thickening of the mists on the meadows, with a stray bit of sunshine between! A rainy day in the country is full to the brim with rare enjoyments, with rare effects of atmosphere and brilliant color-tones, and with clear, ringing sounds about the farmhouse; but within the woods there is only the dripping leaves and what quaint bars of Nature's music the falling rain-drops make. What subtile melody is woven out of these tripping rain-footsteps!

Rainy weather is not to be thought of as something to be endured, but the rather as something

to be enjoyed, and they who enjoy its coming most have most of large-heartedness and generosity; and they who are most impatient of storm and wet are the more selfish and unreasoning. The sun and rain are the truest benefactors of mankind, and the ancients who were guilty of the worship of the elements had much of reason in their religion. The rain-shod winds breathe the rarest poetry of the summer, and with a fund of good spirits out of doors and a bright, snapping, blazing fire on the open hearth indoors, is completed one of the most charming of country pastorals. The lover of the cool, slant-dripping rain is a sure friend to humanity.

AMONG THE HILLS.

Thick-set with spikes of spruce and pine,
Old Kiarsarge' sharpened dome grew dark;
Above the swamp-fog's level line
The pasture-bars stood still and stark;
While from the poplars in the wall
Came, shrilly blown, the night-bird's call,
And mid the roadside clover, tall and damp,
The firefly swung his dimly-lighted lamp.

Beside the farmhouse door, wide-stepped,
The cricket played a lively tune;
His droning song the beetle kept,
The swamp-frog brought his cracked bassoon,
The whippoorwill his piccolo,
The veery sang a rare solo;
While in the smouldering west a single glimmering light
Shone down the mysterious pathway of the night.

In the swift-falling dusk we saw
The low-hung censer of the moon
Swing pendent from this single star,
To downward dip and sink too soon
Its crescent flame and sharp outline
Behind far Conway's ribs of pine,—
Nature's mute prophecy of Summer's hottest days,
Of trailing river-fogs and thirsty water-ways.

AMONG THE HILLS.

SUCH is the recollection of many a summer twilight among the beautiful pine-clad hills of New Hampshire, so noted for their clear, bracing atmosphere, their rugged comeliness, their lofty crests hidden amid the flying clouds; their music of crystal trout-streams leaping headlong down through the hemlocks and singing pines, skirting the winding highways of the mountains hemmed in with fretted margins of fragrant wood-blossoms and aromatic ferns; of wild-rose and purple elderberry; and over-roofing all these woodland and mountain haunts are their bright azure skies.

One must know them and their by-ways as he does the ways and inclinations of a cherished friend. The tie which binds one to Nature must be closely and tenderly knit. One must linger by her side as the lover does by the side of the maid, reading her caprice and wilfulness by the intuition of the heart. To such and such only does Nature reveal her secret ways. Burroughs says, speaking of his finding out the ways of the dwellers of the woods, the whippoor-

wills, the cuckoos, and the thrushes, that one must have all these in his heart, in order to see them as he goes among their haunts. To be sure one stumbles on these treasures sometimes, but their discovery is not the less delightful because unanticipated or unlooked for. As for myself, I never go into the woods or fields but what I seem to be in aimless search of something, and so whatever I find brings with it a more or less perfect sense of compensation. Bird-life and insect-life are full of interest and fascination, and they tell charming stories of instinct and intelligence; and their movements are full of constant surprises, even to those who know them best. The big-bodied humble-bee of the fields and meadows, his coat slashed with gold and black velvet, with pollen-covered wings, probing the pink-hued tubes of the field-clover for their nectar, while the wind sways both bee and clover blossom to and fro like a child in a swing; the ant-carpenter sawing away diligently at a twig or leaf, making lumber for the building and finishing of his house; the gray field-spider setting his filmy trap for a dinner or a breakfast, or else dragging his prey into his funnel-shaped den to sup upon at his leisure, are all abundant in attractions, and are but two or three of the hosts of magicians who make the study of Nature so charming.

I have sat many an hour at various times in the

shadow of the low watering-shed by the roadside at the foot of the long, time-frequented cow-lane, on June afternoons, watching the yellow-winged butterflies coming in from the sunshine to drink of the water of the hillside as it gurgled up from the bottom of the wooden trough where the stand-pipe entered it, with noisy bubblings of crystal air-cells. And with them came the barn-swallows to wet their cement, and then to fly swiftly away to the shadowy rafters and low-reaching eaves of the stables and brown barns. What busy architects they were, and with what infinite patience they fastened straw to straw, shaping their nests securely and symmetrically against the hemlock boarding, — a row of adobe dwellings reaching from gable to gable along the shadowed eaves! and what a chattering of bird-gossip they made as they hurried back and forth over the narrow lane which led from the barns to the highway! What dainty linings of horse-hair and feather for the carpeting of their nests do these winged housekeepers weave; what soft, downy beds are made up for the little swallows that are so soon to peck their way out of the thin shells!

Many a time, while walking along the highway, I have stopped beside the puddles made by a recent shower to count the butterflies, — these brilliantly colored, yellow insect-blossoms of the air, as they alighted one by one along their margins

or gathered about the flower of the stubby bull-thistle, sipping its scant sweets, — and which looks for all the world like a pink tassel growing upside down. I have many a time wished to know why the thistle is clothed in such formidable array of lance and Briarian-needled leaf, this outlaw of the fields. Nature is full of life: is life itself, warm and palpitating. There is little to choose whether you stray amid the fields or try the mountain-side. In the mountains is solitude but for the amber shallows and azure-tinted cascades of the brooks, — of rushing streams, out of the icy coolness of whose leaping floods I have drunk many a time; and in whose clear, limpid currents I have angled whole days through, always with excellent luck; and so much do they seem like old acquaintance, that I never go among them but I feel them to be instinct with Soul. I feel that they know me for a devout worshipper at their rugged shrines. With what gorgeous apparel do they array themselves, these royal hills, in honor of my visit! What aureoles of silvery, filmy cloud and of bright golden sunshine are girded about their stateliness! What fragrant breaths of summer winds do they exhale or blow down their deep woody valleys, and what sharp, slant javelins of summer showers drop down from their bronzed summits! What resonant speech of the thunder comes down from towering rock and broken crag;

what deep mutterings of anger lie pent up within their cavernous chambers! With what thrilling characters of molten flame do they write their mandates upon the clouds!

Tennyson is right. This grandeur of mountain summit and outline, this magnificence of forest dress, these monster pines and spruces, these hoary Druids of the woods, these swiftly flowing waters, this breathing, ever-existent life of bird and insect, of fish and fowl, these impressive silences, are but the apparitions of the great Force which is universal. The woods are full of familiar nooks and tree-trunks, and speak of many pleasant experiences, of many delightful fishing episodes and hunting excursions; and yet they look differently to me at each visit. The conditions are never twice alike of light and shadow or of animate existence. Only the bald tops or the hills are the same, and yet their hues are ever changing under the swift-flying shadow of bellying cloud-sail and wreathing mists, as light as thistle-down and white like thin drifting snows. What puffed out cheeks the mountain clouds have on bright, light days! What iridescent colors play along their edges which lie uppermost and outermost, and what soft, rich tones of purple and slaty grays mark their lower lines. What a Painter is He who lays in the body of all this rich color of rainbow tint! What a Master He who weaves the mar-

vellous texture of the clouds with His shuttle of the winds; what snowy webs are turned out of the looms of the warm, life-giving sunshine! What a wide-open book for men to read, this out-of-door life is! How much there is to see in these tramping-grounds of Nature, and how much there is to learn! The ground is written over in all directions with intelligible signs for men's deciphering. The bee-hunter follows the sugar-eater through the woods, up over the hills, down into the swamps, until the rover's home is found; the sportsman marks his game to cover as unerringly in the thickest of woods as in the open of the fields. The fox-hunter has all the instinct of his hound, but not his power of scent: a day's tramp leads him to the den of the wily Reynard on some far-away hillside. He has translated the language of signs insomuch that he holds the secrets of this wariest and shrewdest of Nature's children. Nature has an alphabet of her own, but it is one that is easily learned if one puts his heart to the learning of it.

A few days ago I had occasion to take the Eastern Express, and as I went flying past field and farmhouse I noticed much that set me to thinking of this very habit which some men have in so great degree of making comparisons wherever Nature enters into the consideration of the matter, the habit which some men have so much culti-

vated of reading a chapter as it were from Nature every day, every day gleaning something new from her wide-open page. The more one reads the more fascinated he becomes and the more loth he is to drop the uncut leaves for the more prosaic ruts of common living. The many little dream of the superabundant life about them, and which washes with its tide, hardly ever at rest, the very door-stones at our thresholds, which lives under the same roof, warming itself at our hearth-stones with the cricket and the spider. What secrets of loosely woven fabric has this silent spinner of the out-of-the-way corners, which may be had for the watching, escaping even the keen-eyed housewife in her daily rounds of sweeping and dusting. What accurate adjustment of plan, what perfection of design and detail, this insect shows us in the building of his filmy web. How like the shadows that lurk in and about the walls and ceilings of our room are the warp and woof of his domicile. What an elusive creature is the chirping cricket when the fires blaze up on the hearth in the early autumn. How shrilly he pipes his single note as the pine-knots crackle between the old-fashioned iron-dogs when the first frosts have whitened the lowlands. What rare company this singer made for our childhood days playing at hide-and-seek the whole evening through. How silently he kept his hiding through the day, to come

out with the dusk and glow of the stars as merry voiced as ever, and when the coals were well raked over he went to bed with us and sang us to sleep. He is the ventriloquist who played us many a prank and quip of sound, and led us many a wild-goose chase over the sanded floors and up the creaking stairway that led with short, steep steps to the big open chamber redolent with the smell of golden corn and fragrant herb which hung pendent from the low sloping rafters. What a beautiful black shiny coat he wore, and what an elegant fit his tailor gave him of close-fitting breeches, and what a graceful little fellow he looked when we were fortunate enough to find him hugging the shelter of some nook or cranny in the rough hemlock boarding of the attic floor. His art of secreting himself was little short of magic to us; but whenever we had captured him we let him go uninjured, and then he would light himself to bed by a ray of mellow moonlight which had stolen its way into our company through the closely woven foliage of the over-arching elms which sheltered the roof from storm and sun. We were never allowed to carry a candle into the attic at night, and it was only when mother came up to see that we were well tucked in, that the flickering light of the homely tallow-dip glanced along the smooth pine rafters, making weird shadow-pictures here and there, and which lingered in the brain long

after the door had closed at the foot of the stairs. A whippoorwill used to come into the orchard at the back of the farmhouse, where through the midsummer night he would entertain our wakeful hours with his singularly plaintive notes. Sometimes the water-thrush would come to the edge of the pasture and pour out upon the silence of the night a nocturne of marvellous melody. Even now the notes go floating through my brain as clearly as I heard them so long ago. I have heard the water-thrush many a time since, and the beauty of this bird's song is not less wonderful now than then.

This day which had started me eastward toward the Maine hills had opened delightfully warm and sunny, but at noon as I left the city the sky was overcast: there was a threat of rain in the low-hanging clouds which shut so closely down over the woods, the gray flats, and shore sands to seaward, and over the hills inland. Hardly an hour had elapsed and the rain began to beat a sharp tattoo on the monitor roof and to trickle down the opposite car window. How much there was to see even in the rain! At one hamlet a little off the highway a bluff-looking farmer, tall and grizzly-bearded, was mending his pump by the barnyard gate. He never looked up as the train passed, but seemed deeply absorbed in his labor. It was a quaint picture, this old man in his shirt-sleeves,

working in the rain with hammer and saw, so indifferent to the rushing, roaring train which brought him the news from the outer world. A little farther on I saw a man walking down the slope of his planted lands with his hoe over his shoulder. In his walk and bearing he was the personification of that independence which is ever associated with farm-life, — with its sunshine, bright, warm, and generous, its breezy pine-flavored winds, its wide outlooks on stormy days, its clear, invigorating atmosphere, and its dreamy summer twilights. Country quiet is to some people a synonyme for dulness, but it is a far remove from dulness. In the country everything is full of life, even to the fungi-covered timbers half-hidden in the tall grasses of the roadside. This is Nature's domain, and her drones and workers seem not less a part of the world than its human kind. I have no doubt but my stalwart farmer knight has ploughed in the same field of philosophy, getting about the same yield per acre as myself; it would be surprising if he did not, for he looks a sensible man every inch of him, as most farmers do. What makes a man more sensible than

> "To plough and to sow,
> To reap and to mow,"

with understanding and diligence?

The corn rows ran up and down the hill as

straightly as chalk-lines, and our farmer was reading Nature's prognostics from his bulletin of brown dirt, of wet-dripping clouds, and of low-sweeping swallows dodging the drops here and there. The rain was singing him a song of life and of bountiful harvests as he trudged thoughtfully between the sprouting, growing corn, his great boots clogged with the moist earth. What a magnificent physique our farmer had! and what mattered it if he did get a wetting? This is what he calls "growing weather." No doubt his philosophy was broader by far than that of the discontented travellers who were leaving him so swiftly behind.

There is a deal of human destiny crowded into these long railway trains which go rushing by hillside farm and country hamlet with their long trail of dense smoke to mark their way by day, and which is so luminous in the falling darkness, and which wake the echoes of sleepy cities in the deep of night with their shrill alarm of whistle and reverberant roar. How tireless is the mechanism of man's invention, that hurries To-day into To-morrow; that knows no weariness of day or night, no division of time as it speeds on its journey toward the sunrise or sunset! How can one be indifferent to this flying Mercury, whose gleaming pathway reaches out into the hills and forests and out over the plains like a network of so many human spiders' weaving? Here is a romance in

iron indeed! A romance of ores, of dingy workshops, of glowing red-hot forges, of the modern Vulcan and his army of trained helpers, of ponderous trip-hammers and broad-armed cranes that loom up through the yellow, smoky atmosphere of the foundery like giant gallows; a romance of noisy, bustling industries which set in motion the wheels of the world; a romance of armored ship, and all the enginery of war and conquest; a romance of glittering wealth and luxury.

But what flying pictures one gets from the swiftly moving train! What glimpses of quiet homestead closely nestled under the shadows of hillside slopes, of broad intervales and inland ponds. I have just passed one of those tiny lakelets so common in Maine landscapes. Beside its woody margin stand two urchins, barefooted, with trousers rolled high above their knees. One of them is fishing with a crooked birch pole. I can tell it by its dirty-white bark. The little fellow has thrown his line out into the blue ripples which come inshore with the wind, while the smaller urchin is trimming the crotched top of an alder-sprout for a "string" on which to carry their spoils of silvery chub and iridescent perch. They are evidently at the beginning of their sport, and it does not seem so many years ago when I was the boyish counterpart of these young Waltons. I began my fishing with a bit of twine string and a bent pin for a

hook. Minnows and boys have natural affinities. Boys begin with fishing for minnows and trout, but end later on in life with fishing for men and fortunes; but men, like trout, are wary and suspicious, and fortunes are elusive. Not every fisher of men is successful, but human nature in the boy and man is markedly similar. Both are made up of like traits which are carried through life without other change than that of natural development according to circumstance and opportunity. The narrow brooklet which went singing down between the slopes of the valley just beyond the old brick school-house of my boyish recollection has won me many a word of biting censure from the female pedagogues of those days, and not unfrequently have my bare laggard legs been made to tingle warmly by an energetic application of apple-tree sprout and birchen switch. I remember how we boys and girls would put the yellow petals of the tall, slender buttercup under our chins in turn to see if we "loved butter," and our blowing the gray tops of the burned-out dandelion blossoms to see if "mother wanted us at home." The girls, with their bright, clear complexions, were every one dear lovers of butter by this childish test. What bright reflections from these brilliantly colored wild-flowers bloomed out on the delicately rounded contour of girlish mouth and chin, and what rippling music of girlish laughter filled them

with deepening dimples that won our boyish hearts as we thought without recall. What perfume of clover, blushing red with Nature's passion, what snowy levels of wide-eyed daisies were the boon companions of golden-hearted childhood. Was ever anything more beautiful to our childish eyes than the royal hue of the Blue Flag, — the Iris of the meadows? and what bunches of delicate purple color of the "Flower-de-Luce" towered above the sedgy grasses of our playground! Longfellow sings of the Iris: —

"Thou art the Iris, from celestial portals
Sent with thy golden rods
To bring some gift or message unto mortals
From the immortal gods.

"Thou art the Muse, that hath her habitation
Beside the silent streams,
Peopling with phantoms of imagination
The border-land of dreams."

And what dreams are like those of far-away childhood? I never see the Iris but I hear the lightsome, buoyant melody that in those days went flying over the alder-tops, where Robin Redbreast spent the whole day whistling to the summer wind, and where Robert-of-Lincoln scattered his notes broadcast on the breeze, each one like the sparkling raindrops of a summer shower, and with a most reckless disregard of the wishes of other songsters to be heard at this outdoor concert.

Sparrow, catbird, thrush, and numerous woodland vagabonds who sang to us without stint, sing for me now as then. In those days I never tired of watching the orioles and red-crested woodpeckers cleaving the air like bits of bright crimson flame; and how intensely blue were the skies reaching ever downward to the hills that hemmed in the broad acres of fragrant bloom of nodding clover, with bronzed dragon-fly and burly bumble-bee to keep them company, with hosts of flying shadows to hide them from the hot sun! Halcyon days indeed! when our hardest task was to sit in the uncomfortable desks where our fathers and mothers had sat before us, and with a no less irksome experience than our own! So much of reminiscence have these two urchins given me, and who seemed to me but a second edition of my own childhood. I have been really a boy for a moment, and how freshly everything comes back to me! I wonder of what my fellow-travellers are thinking. I have thought that thinking must be akin to electricity, it is so swift winged.

What a strange sprite is Thought! What an unruly sort of a fellow, full of aimless wanderings, and yet a very Hercules when his shoulder is at the wheel. Every snort and puff of the locomotive, which is taking me nearer the blue hills of boyhood, shouts the triumph of Thought over Matter. The telegraph-poles which fly so swiftly

past me are every one witnesses to the power of Thought over Time and to the subjection of Space. How wonderful this quality of the human brain, which has lashed the Demon of the Lightning to the lamp-post, which has given it the tongue and speech of man, and which has taught it the art of writing its messages. Thought will find for you the innermost secrets of Nature, once aroused to its task. Thought is the Alchemist, the Merlin of Mankind, the fuel of the World's enlightenment, as Force is the expression of Natural Law.

But the rain is over, or rather we have emerged from it some time since, and there are ruddy streaks of sky above the White Hills in the west. The old homestead looks down the highway at me with warm, flashing panes, — the old-time greeting at sunset! but I shall slumber under the silent shadows of New England's mountain monarch with to-morrow's falling dusk. To-night as the sun goes down I watch the slow shifting lights of the landscape from my hammock under the elms of childhood. The moon is rising over Quito Mountain; the lonely cry of the loon comes up from the pond back of the hill, and the air is filled with drowsy sounds. The stairs to the attic under the roof answer to my tread with their old sympathetic creak as I feel my way in the dark, as I used to do years ago; and amid the perfume of sweet-scented herbs I am *en route* to the land of dreams!

I.

ON THE PEABODY RIVER.

HAVE found, like the charm of a rare day in June, slowly fading away with the brilliant setting of the sun, with its beautiful landscape softened and subdued in the slow-rising mists of fragrant meadows and leafy lowlands, the lively reminiscences and treasured memories of a summer vacation among the real pleasures of its more active enjoyments. The snapping fore-stick of my open fire in the early autumn recalls happily its larger prototype which blazed so cheerily upon the broad hearth-stones of a famous hostelry in the heart of the White Mountains, as I returned at night hungry and tired, yet strangely exhilarated, from some one of the many trout-streams in its vicinity. Each recollection is surrounded with a halo of its own. My fire snaps lively-like, and with the swift flame that mounts the narrow flue each takes on the charm of realism; in the hiss and sputter of the burning wood I hear the murmur of pleasant voices, while the thin wreaths of smoke grow into familiar shapes,

and the dream becomes more real as I stray in pleasant reverie among the shadows of the White Hills. Certainly no more charming place can be found for a brief stay in this wilderness of Nature than the Glen, for I am sure they who look out through its clear morning air upon the sharply cut lines of its mountain summits, massed solidly against the blue background of the sky, the graceful yet imposing proportions of Madison and its brotherhood of like noble lineage, can leave them with no other than the sincerest desire to return for a space with each recurring season. Utter quiet and repose, wonderful feasts of color, charm and grandeur of mountain scenery, tempt the lover of Nature pure and simple with a power hardly to be withstood; and here, too, are outdoor sports in abundant variety. No point in the mountains affords more promise to the summer idler, who, like a bee flitting from flower to flower, finds here at last the sweets that reward his wandering search. So it seemed to myself upon my second coming hither, as my expectant eye caught the first glimpse of the home-lights of the Glen through the falling dusk of a late August day, as our driver made the rise beyond Nineteen-mile Brook.

The crimson flush had long faded from the stony profile which marks the grim visage of the Imp. The slow climbing of the hills had grown tedious, and the sibilant song of the brakes monotonous,

as we rattled down the steep sides of the valleys, arousing the answering echoes far and wide; the jolting over the loose planks of the rude bridges thrown across the highway at frequent intervals and its rough places had become more wearisome; so, when cramped and stiff from long-enforced position I had dismounted at mine host Milliken's door, it was with such appreciation of coming rest and good cheer in the cheery welcome of a blazing fire of huge logs, with their crackling promise of abundant creature comforts, as to make me forget all the discomforts of my ride.

Giving my luggage and sporting outfit to John, a whole-hearted and genial son of Erin, I was shown to my room, which faced squarely upon the Presidential range, beautiful even at night. This gave me an added pleasure. The black woods swept like a sombre drapery down from the summits of the mountains; the night-mists blew in ghostly shapes down the valley, adding to the weird effect of the deep night-shadows, and about each lofty peak the bright stars hung in glittering crowns, with the slender sickle of the new moon above them all. Dark, soundless, and lonely, their depths lay spread out for miles and miles; soundless but for the eternal speech of the streams which gush from their hearts outward into the broad intervales of the Androscoggin. How one can look upon such a vision of the greatness of

Nature, and not feel subdued and silenced, I could never imagine; for if ever the sense of one's littleness is forced upon him, it must be when he stands within the shadow and majesty of the Hills.

Here, in the Wambek Methna of the North, the White Hills of New England, one finds Nature in her grandest and most imposing array. Her leaping streams tumbling down the broad valleys, and surging over their precipitous highways choked with massive boulders, falling

> "From morn to noon, —
> From noon to eve, a summer's day,"

into such depths as Milton saw with mental vision, black as Erebus and peopled with gloomy shadows and damp, misty shapes, careering through wild ravines, or trickling down from mountain-top to lowest base over the stained ledges in gleaming lines of molten silver, are the personification of Abandon. Her ragged crags and precipices, shorn of all their covering of verdure, stripped to the bare rock by the elements, gray, barren, and forsaken, tell the story of the Desolation of the Storm. Power, the power which is supreme in Nature, and which awes to silence, is written upon every lineament of these mountain-faces. The Invisible is here revealed by the majesty and magnificence of his handiwork. His hand is

reached out to us, and we are led dumb-like through the grandest cloisters of his temples. But to-night the great organ is silent. The wind has dropped to sleep, and so have the mountain worshippers. The only sound that comes to me through my half-raised window is the low-pitched tone, the drowsy murmur of the Peabody, but a few steps away.

Much as I enjoyed the picturesque beauty of the scene, the inner man demanded the appeasing of a robust appetite, and which done, I planned my outing for the following day. I had determined to make a trouting trip down the Peabody River. Calling John, I crossed his calloused palm with a bit of silver, and the answering smile left no room to doubt but that my wants would be duteously attended to. He knew where the fattest angle-worm family lived, and would pay them an early morning call in my behalf.

Seated before the huge open fire, how its ruddy light flashed outward across the broad hall and along the walls of the hostelry ! The soot burned in lurid lines of battle across the dingy chimney-back, as in childhood days I had seen it do at the old homestead, and the tourists, scattered in groups here and there in the firelight, seemed more like the components of some great family reunion than the acquaintance of a single day. How brightly the fire blazed upon the broad hearth !

Its crackle, mingling with the drowsy hum of voices but indistinctly heard, was but a prelude to the sweet, restful slumber which came with the later nightfall.

A few rods below the hostelry, the beautiful Peabody River flows over a bed of sienna-colored pebbles with many a gleam and ripple as the sun lights up the countless facets that gather and break along its surface, each of the brilliance of a diamond. Its rise is three miles away in Huntington Ravine, close under the towering dome of Mount Washington, — a stream that was born in a single night, in the throes of a terrible autumn storm, if the legend is to be believed. Having taken an early breakfast, and with feet stoutly clad, my gossamer coat securely lashed to my creel-strap, with slender rod in hand, and with heart as light as that of a boy of fifteen, I started upward and southward on the road to Jackson. A rubber coat is very convenient as one threads these mountain defiles, for the showers come down the mountain-passes without warning; and one thing is certain, whenever it rains here, the wet drops pour straight down as if the bottom had dropped from every cloud. The evening before was fine and clear, but the mountain-peaks on this particular morning were obscured by broken masses of cloud, which blew apart for an hour only to close up darker and thicker than before. The mountain-peaks were indulging in a

veritable fit of sulks, as royal people frequently do. Less than a quarter of a mile away the width of the valley is compressed into the narrowness of a ravine, the entrance to which leads up and along the outer ramparts of Pinkham Notch, and down through which the Peabody pours like a mad torrent. The highway snail-like toils up, up, always up, along the slopes of the Wildcat to the divide of the Pinkham Notch, where the music of the Peabody is supplemented by that of the wilder and more romantic Ellis. The way hither is full of quiet charm and enjoyment; for once within the margin of the woods, the traveller along this stretch of mountain-road, winding its way through an unkempt wilderness, hemmed in by the deep, cool shadows of a luxuriant woodland growth, may revel in the perfume and fascination of the primeval woods. Here are masses of golden-rod bloom, and dainty sprays of the pale frost-flower, shoulder high. Intermingled with them are clusters of the scarlet berry of the bitter alder, that shines like pellets of wax. The snowy foam of the river, bowling along with a boisterous, rollicking song, is brilliant in its whiteness, and the splash, dash, and spatter of this woodland romp, filling the ear with its medley of sounds, the picture of Nature's painting, hedging one about like a huge cyclorama, and the bracing atmosphere, are all so exhilarating that every nerve tingles with suppressed excite-

ment. Is it any wonder that all the buoyancy in one's nature should come with a single bound to the surface? I did not attempt to repress those livelier sensations which since boyhood seemed to have lain dormant. I hallooed with all the zest of a boy, and the echoes went flying up and down the ravine to lose themselves at last in the brawl of the leaping water below me.

A half-hour's climb ends at the well-worn path that follows the steep descent to the edge of Emerald Pool, made famous by its portrait by Beirstadt. To strike in here, but little more than a mile from the Glen House, and from thence follow the wayward stream down, is the proper thing, and there is no need of haste. At first glance at the liquid emerald below, one's inclination is to sit down upon the rude plank seat upheld between two huge spruces growing just above the Pool, so restful and so full of repose is this charming nook. It is a place above all others in which to dream and drowse. Strange fancies flit through the brain, and the world is forgotten. I am sitting at the feet of Nature, spellbound by the magic of her subtile influences. Above is the dark silhouette of the tree-tops against the sky, and below is a circular sheet of water, less than a hundred feet in diameter, unsurpassed in its natural beauty by any woodland pool I had ever seen, and so translucent as to

reflect the minutest object above it. It is an emerald cup brimful of liquid amber. At its head, massive buttresses of granite stretch almost across the stream, to stay the torrent of the Peabody but a moment, that with tumultuous roar pushes through the narrow flume of these rocks out into the basin of deep, calm waters, leaving a track white as the snow of winter. A few feet below the commotion of the cascade, the boiling, seething current is soon lost in faint and ever-widening ripples, tinged with every shade of green from dark to light, — to almost the paleness of sherry as they reach out toward the shallows at its lower edge, where they again escape in wild, broken leaps over its mountain roadway, paved with immense boulders, into the valley. An old, gnarled wide-limbed canoe-birch, dirty-white, spotted with blotches of sienna and umber, leans far out over the Pool, every limb and tiny twig of which is reproduced in reverse upon or within its polished surface, while around its ragged margin the tall shapely spruces keep stately watch over this jewel of the mountain, most beautiful when the sun pours down its strong vertical light, when the waters become transparent like crystal, and that are like a huge palette strown with rare colors of sky and wood. The rude setting of parti-colored rocks adds to the picturesque beauty of the stream, and as I prepare for my first throw

it would not be surprising to see a troop of Naiads rise impetuously to protest against my design. Hardly has the hook struck the water than a silvery gleam lights up the monotony of its placid surface, and a thrill as subtile as the shock of a galvanic battery shoots along the line to the tips of my fingers, and in a single moment his troutship has described a parabola through the air, and is safely landed in my basket. There is more virtue in the shock from a sharp trout-bite than from all the electrical appliances in existence; and were I a physician I should prescribe trout-fishing in large doses to half my patients. My pocket might suffer, but I should have done my duty by my clientele. Anglers have tender hearts, as was that of dear old Izaac Walton; but no music sounds sweeter in the ear of the true fisherman than the spasmodic flop of the first trout against the side of his creel, especially if of good size. What a hornpipe he dances in the grass-lined basket! It is the dance of death to him; but to me it is a rare panacea for broken rest and over-worked body and brain.

From the edge of the Pool downward to the valley the bed of the river widens, and the waters speed along with a devil-may-care recklessness, as if conscious of the long meadows below, where they must needs retard their turbulent movement. Over its sturdy barriers it leaps with a headlong

rush and roar, dashing broad sheets of spray, bright and glistening, against the ochre-stained walls of its rough-set channel.

The beauty of mountain scenery, especially along the Peabody, lies in its endless variety. A new point of view, and the outlines change, — a new picture greets the vision. So pushing down the gorge, every step opens up some fresh and charming vista of wild and rugged scenery, — some new wonderland of the stream, before or behind. But without the accompanying sport of angling for the spotted beauties that hide within the eddying currents, and of pulling them struggling from their hiding-places, such a jaunt would be fatiguing and even forbidding. What leaps one takes from rock to rock, and what splendid chances for an ice-cold bath; but the eye measures the distance accurately, and, with only a disagreeable jar now and then, the expedition is made in safety. Only danger, or the strong impulse born of momentary excitement, would carry one across the rifts and chasms and rocky flumes in this highway of boisterous floods. An untimely slip would result in a bad fall, with possibly serious consequences. In these mountain jaunts the better way is to take a congenial disciple of the rod along with you. It is safest so to do.

The prevailing tones of the foliage are dark, but now and then a scarlet maple flames out a bit of

premature color, brilliant and striking enough as it is pleasing; a wandering bee darts down the opening in the wood, a gleam of burning gold; a solitary eagle casts a slow-moving shadow athwart the rocks; but I miss the birds of the lowlands, though there is good shooting here in the early fall months.

Along this by-way of Nature the combination of tree, rock, and stream is picturesque and animating. There is none of the overpowering depression incident to the dark, threatening chasms and mist-laden shadows of Nineteen-mile Brook. Soft mosses and trailing vines fringe the sloping banks of the lowlands as I enter them, where a succession of quiet pools offer resting-places for the Spirit of the Waters, and each pays its tribute to the angler's skill. Looking back through the vista of stately trees, the rocky pathway behind seems like a rudely sculptured staircase, leading as it were into the vast cathedral of the mountain, with countless nave and transept adorned with arabesques of graceful foliage along its sides, and overarching all, the blue vault of the heaven. From the lichens and damp mosses, the gray, shaggy trunks of the wood, their matted carpetings of luxuriant vines, I emerge into the meadow, with its levels of swaying grasses and ample sunlight. The spell of forest cloister is broken, and with an involuntary shiver the chill of the moun-

tain woods is shaken off, and the day is begun anew. Swaths of new-mown grass reach down to the brink of the river, and throw off a delicious perfume, and through the narrow margin of the dwarf alders that mark the swales with their green hedges I get glimpses of the red blouse of the haymaker, — bits of warm, strong color in the dun-hued landscape. Just over the knoll to the right the smokes of the new hostelry curl lazily upward in the still air, and below the toll-bridge, the wicket through which the tourist passes to the summit of the White Hills, the stream grows wider, shallower, and less impulsive, indulging in many a tender dalliance with the brown pebbles strown so thickly over the river-bottom, its droning music dying away in soft murmurs as it reaches the deep, dark waters of the mill-pond, so silent under the shadows of the round-topped elms that line its edges, and that add so much of pastoral charm and beauty.

Not a foot of the river, which seems already like an old friend, has escaped scrutiny, as many a greedy trout has found to his cost. The transition from the rough mountain-side to the more prosaic charm of the lowland farm is a swift one; but here the stream, grown bores, its wild license of leaping cataract and deafening tumult is left behind. A farewell look at the opal current, its troops of pale asters, that dip and nod so gracefully

on its brink, its slender cardinal-flowers amid-stream, flaming up like torches, tingeing the surface with splashes of blood-red scarlet, and I have clambered up the bank, a tangled steep, just beyond which, in the gulley, is "Josh Billings's" spring, marked with white-painted slab nailed crossways to a stout stake. With a cooling draught from its crystal fountain I wend my way homeward, and the forenoon's sport is done.

II.

NINETEEN-MILE BROOK.

MINE host had suggested a trip to Nineteen-mile Brook as one which would repay the hardships of the jaunt. Acting upon a few general directions, which proved to be very indefinite in character, morning found me with rod and basket shouldered, and well started upon a solitary, and as it proved a somewhat haphazard journey. I began my trudge in high spirits, but my return was more wearisome. There are three ways of reaching this famous trout-stream: first by the way of the tortuous sluice, nearly two miles in length, by which the Glen House is supplied with the purest of water; next, by the highway to its outlet, where it empties into the larger Peabody, and thence up; and, lastly, by the more direct route of an old, and, in some places, entirely obliterated logging-road. I chose the latter; and making steep ascent of the lower outworks of Carter Mountain, keeping as nearly as possible the faint trail, described by John as the "path sorr," I entered upon a corduroy-

road that was quite plain for a short distance, when it disappeared entirely in a perfect wilderness of spruce-tops, strewn about in utter disregard of who might come after. It was a labyrinth worthy the invention of a Dædalus. Slipping, jumping, and creeping over and through the intricacies of acres of bristling tree-tops I at last emerged into the "open," completely puzzled as to the whereabouts of the logging-road. Here and there a quaint, weather-bleached stub pointed straight skyward; the Sphinx could not have been more reticent than these silent memorials of the old spruce forest. Each seemed a counterpart of the other, and under an overcast sky, without compass or guide, whither to turn was an absorbing and perplexing question.

Keeping close to the mountain-side, and pushing through the dense growth of dwarf cherry and birch, breaking down a bush-top every few rods to mark the trail, if it should become needful to retrace my footsteps, — and which was a most wise precaution on my part, — I found at last the upper end of the sluice, and had soon reached the brook. It was a long, perilous journey, and more than once the disagreeable sense of uncertainty as to my whereabouts was uppermost in mind. Two hours of the morning had been exhausted in what was more than once seemingly a fruitless search, and it was with the greatest satisfaction that I at

last found myself beside this famous trout-stream. In my haste to get to its leaping current I broke the tip to my rod, but fortunately near the ferrule. Whittled to a point, and pushed hard into its socket, it served me through the day, and in fact during my stay among these New Hampshire hills. From this point I followed the stream well up into the Notch on this side, through the wildest gorge of the Carter range; and, singular as it may seem, the nearer its headwaters the better I found the fishing! Mountain trout are good climbers to reach this altitude of rocky steep and dangerous chasm. He is a hardy sportsman who has the pluck to explore Nineteen-mile Brook without a guide, and I would hardly advise a stranger to the topography of Carter Mountain to brook the peril of getting lost in the maze of undergrowth that makes the warp and woof of this rugged forest. At best the brook is a stream of barricades. Trees twisted and torn by the winds are thrown lengthwise and across it, and with the huge rocks embedded amid stream, they form natural ramparts to prevent farther progress, as if some genii of the forest had forbidden a deeper penetration into the secret fastnesses beyond. The most absolute silence reigns. The woods rise above me like the giants of a huge amphitheatre, within whose arena the Titans of the muttering storms struggle for the mastery of domain; and, stirred and shaken to

the heart's core by the thunder's deep reverberations of applause, rising rank upon rank like the old Roman sight-seers, they stand the incarnation of repose.

How grand, how overpowering, the solitude of this mountain wilderness! How vast these dim aisles, that reach out into deeper, darker growths of spruce and pine! How human seem these silent yet ever-living apparitions of the Deity that crowd so closely around me! Their silence would be oppressive were it not for the unbroken monody of the cataract that threads the pathway of the winter snows, ever leaping downward into the valley in tumultuous abandon. Here is unkempt Nature in truth. I stand abashed before her wild magnificence of rugged beauty and untaught grace. What perfection of form, what wealth of grandeur and power is here of gnarled, arching root, of huge, black trunk, of wide-spread, branching arms, ever reaching upward to the clouds that sweep their tops; what deep shadows enfold the pygmy at their feet. Here are rocks, high up along this mountain-side, which looked on at the building of the world; and what grand secrets are locked within their hearts of stone! What histories of countless races are inscribed within their granite archives! Along these lofty hills are writ the hieroglyphics of their building, the footprints of the Deity. What a place for communing with one's inner

self! How narrow grows the span of human living under these lofty giants of the woods, whose speech is of the centuries! Art thou a Pharisee? then come not here, lest thou be humbled as a child. Nature has no use for human pride or human folly.

For some distance down, the course of the brook is through a deep, narrow fissure in the rocks. It might be well taken for the descent to Hades, so gloomy, dark, and damp grows the ravine. The trees shut closely in overhead, making an arcade of limb and leaf so tightly interlaced as to effectually bar out all sunshine, and below, the channel of the brook is held within lofty, perpendicular walls of sombre-colored granite, bare and smooth, as if faced with maul and chisel. The voices of the rushing waters seemed smothered and pent up. Strong currents of cold air strike the face, and deep shadows tinge the writhing foam with a grayish cast, while the narrow pools below the boiling torrent are as black as ebony. So steep is the descent down the mountain that the brook is visible but a short distance in advance. Burly and unyielding as seem these huge rocks, they have been strangely shattered and riven apart by the wild, unrestrained forces of Nature. How like human arteries are these silver streams. They are the life-currents of Nature feeding the thirsty valleys, to be again drunk up by the sun and car-

ried back into the heart of the mountains, where they received their birth, and thence to go outward over the same pathway of rock to renew their beneficent work.

I have read with interest Mr. Drake's realistic description of his visit to Carter Notch; but instead of taking dinner in the "old cabin," my guide, the same honest "Jock" Davis, built a fire of dry twigs on the terraced rocks by the side of the Wildcat. A cobble of stones was very quickly, deftly arranged, and a battered stew-pan of ancient pattern, shining with much wear, was put atop of all. Two dozen trout were "dressed," and with salt, pepper, and golden corn-meal, and a generous slice of pork, they were soon browned to a nicety. We had hard bread in abundance, and a delicious dinner was enjoyed, accompanied by not less delicious draughts of ice-cold water from the river, which ran pure as crystal over the rocks, scoured clean by centuries of attrition. Every part of the process of the making of this mountain repast, simple but rare, was tinged with the romance of the backwoods, and we ate with appetites whetted to a peculiar keenness by our mountain sport. That was a memorable visit to the Carter Notch, bringing home as we did over two hundred good-sized trout.

The physical features of Nineteen-mile Brook and the Wildcat are very similar. Both are boisterous,

swift-running waterways which pour out into the intervales of the Androscoggin and of the beautiful Conway, through scenery of remarkable grandeur, and yet distinctively different from either that of the larger Peabody or its western tributary, the West Branch on the opposite side of the Glen. Midday found me at the head of the sluice on my return down stream. Trout were abundant but small. From the ledges below, the Peabody Valley is in plain sight, but for the intercepting tops of the forest-trees; for it is still a long and steep descent to the river. On the right for a distance down is an airy trestle-work of fast decaying upright timbers, planted amid the boulders of the brook with cross-beams stretching inward to the bank, the margin of which overhangs the whirling waters forty feet below. Along these timbers lay heavy spruce stringers, notched and pinned at intervals, and atop of this seemingly frail foundation are laid the short logs that make the corduroy road. It is a specimen of fertile backwoods' ingenuity; for, as I am told, immense quantities of timber have found their way in years past over this rude logging-trail to the mills below. There is a sense of companionship about this dilapidated bit of road-building which comes with the manifest human endeavor to which it bears witness. Acres and acres of the mountain-side have been denuded of their stately spruce and pine, now overgrown

with the broad-leaved moosewood, with birch, cherry, and sparsely scattered maple, and amid all this waste, dead tree-tops bristle in every direction, making the undergrowth an almost impenetrable jungle. Gazing from some vantage-point at these vast mountain-ridges, fascinated with the wonderful smoothness of verdure, which like a green garment clothes their rugged slopes, one fails by lack of more intimate acquaintance to conceive the tangle of thicket and slippery, moss-grown boulder that tasks the stoutest brawn, and at every upward turn combats the energy of the explorer. The faint sound of invisible torrents afford the uninitiate no suggestion of the wild panorama of forest-nook and mad caprice of whirling waters which hide behind these draperies of foliage. Behind the swaying tree-tops are inaccessible precipices, heaps of scattered boulders and fallen trees, the work of ages. Storm and frost, the fires of earth and of heaven, are accomplishing a constant work of demolition. Here Nature adds and subtracts her factors to and from each other, solving the problems of the centuries in silent disregard of human interference. Here are tall spruces roughly scarred by winter and summer storm, with pendent globules of rare amber-colored gum, and which have been daintily distilled by the summer heats out of rich, flowing saps, and which hang just out of reach above me. Its gathering is quite a business,

and is quite profitable to trapper and guide hereabouts. The lumbermen bring large quantities of this fruit of the spruce as they come down from the timber-slopes, and which readily finds a market at the druggist's, from whose plate-glass windows it looks out, not upon the pageantry of merrie June or the dreamy quiet of an Indian summer among the hills, but rather upon the pride and squalor of the town, and from whose sweet-scented cases, with all their aristocratic surroundings, it is sold to shop-girls, dyspeptics, and school-children.

O, the seductive charm of its aromatic quid in school-boy days! How many were the richly merited chastisements of leathern strap and birchen switch its clandestine yet delicious chewing brought upon our shoulders! What rare visions of youth are stored within its transparent depths: of staunch, glittering crusts, of clumsy snow-shoes and boyish awkwardness; of winter air and winter life, when the earth has begun its inclination toward the sun, bringing pleasant warmth and dripping eaves at high noon, and longer days; of fragrant woods, when boyhood has gone into the lowland spruces, when the March winds sing weird, crooning lullabys amid their tops, and shake down upon one's shoulders huge flakes of snow which the last storm had lodged so thickly over their matted boughs, to search for amber jewels! What memories of irate pedagogue, of sunlight slanting down

the narrow aisle, of loudly accentuated footstep, of sharply questioning eye, of pinioned chin and far-protruding tongue! Dead men tell no tales, and the bit of chewing-gum, secretly started on its way down the youthful gullet a moment before, is beyond the reach of the baffled schoolmaster, who can scarce conceal his chagrin. What boyish pranks were carried on behind the sloping tops of the old pine desks of the low-roofed brick school-house the master might imagine, but never discover. The aroma of the spruce brings back the tide of youth again, with all its adventure of winter sport and blush of summer days in field and wood.

Occasionally the deep baying of hounds comes up on the wind; and what a wind it is, — cold, damp, and disagreeable. A stiff breeze is blowing from the base of the mountain upward through this natural pneumatic-tube, making the brawny limbs of the trees groan and screech as if in pain. The dark leaves, up-blown, take the hue of silver, and now and then a rotten branch comes sailing down with a stealthy plash into the water. There is a sound of heavy feet in the underbrush yonder, and with expectant look I scan the rocks above me to see if some grim Bruin is overlooking my adventure. It is only the pounding of the tumultuous waters, or the fancy of an over-alert imagination. Bears are not uncommon here; in fact, some years they are seen too often for the tourist's

peace of mind. But how the wind blows! I can hardly make the cast down-stream. The clouds shut closely in overhead; the breeze dies away; the air grows dark and murky, and the trees seem shorter and their tops nearer the ground, and one by one the huge round drops of rain give warning of the coming squall. There is just time to get on my rubber coat, and the rain falls heavily, lashing the brook into foam. How the trout take the bait! but as suddenly as it came the shower is over, and the bright sun lights up the dim vista of this rugged waterway once more. As its waters glint and glisten it is difficult to imagine the roaring torrent, which, on an autumn night of years ago, rushed down over these steeps, making the solid earth tremble under the shock of their terrible assault; but there is hardly a mountain stream which has not allied to it some tale of tragic interest, and the Nineteen-mile Brook is not an exception. The land-slip of Carter Mountain, which occurred on an autumn day of long ago, will be long remembered. Two whole days the clouds had hidden the tops of the neighboring mountains, gathering from far and near for the assault. On a Sunday night the storm set in. All night and during the next day it raged among the mountains, beating with relentless fury against the side of the Dome; the wind blew a hurricane; the rain fell in torrents, flooding the valleys and filling the hearts

of their dwellers with terror. The trees and rocks, loosened in the storm, came tumbling down the steep sides of the mountain into the gorge of this brook. Its narrow defile choked with water, and the débris of an enormous landslide swept with resistless power down the bed of this stream into the Peabody, carrying everything before it. The Androscoggin rose six feet in a single night. The lowland farmers had not witnessed such a storm for a generation. Millions of logs and a score of saw-mills were swept away, and many lives were destroyed. Never since has such a wild storm fallen upon this region. Hardly a bridge was left upon its foundations; and at this day the gruff denizen of these mountain fastnesses alludes to the event as the "Great storm of '69."

But here I am at the stage-road. It is a good ten-mile journey I have taken, and I have an impression, from my aching shoulders, that my creel has grown heavy; and winding in my line, I am *en route* for home. The sun is disappearing behind the mountain-ridges and the bronzed peak of Mount Washington looms up grandly into the clear atmosphere, the impersonation of Repose, solemn, stately, and still. I climb a sharp rise in the hilly highway, and just beyond, in the cool, gray shadows of the early twilight, I catch glimpses of the curling smokes of the hotel and of moving figures down the highway. I hear voices,

and what an indescribable charm they suggest of home, with its warm, glowing hearth and companionship, after the lonesome experiences of the day. But I have brought the romance of the stream with me, even into the prosaic and commonplace highway; and even though I am plodding along the worn ruts of a road-building humanity, my thoughts are not altogether with them. My ears still ring with the clamor of the impetuous waters; visions of leafy arches and sculptured groins, of shaggy columns and of huge granite fonts, echoing strange sounds, as if an untaught hand had swept across the keys of some great organ concealed in the shadowy cloisters of their wildernesses, crowded swift about me. Like a photographer's plate, the retina had unconsciously stored away a multitude of negatives through the day, and the process of their developing began only when I had turned my back upon this rich feast of Nature. So the day ended, and no slumber was ever more peaceful or rest more invigorating than that which came with the slow-falling night.

III.

ON THE WEST BRANCH.

REACHING the house on my return from Nineteen-mile Brook, a curious-minded group gathered about my basket to inspect the trout, as fresh and glossy as when pulled from their hiding-places in that rollicking mountain stream. The trout is the most beautiful of all the finny tribe, and the sport of angling for them is most fascinating and exciting. The delay in my return and the lateness of the hour had occasioned some considerable alarm among the guests, though the landlord assured them that the wanderer would come with the nightfall. So he did, but how nearly my experience came to foolhardiness none knew so well as myself; for the prospect of a night on the mountain is not productive of pleasurable anticipation.

The Glen was always the favorite fishing-ground of the veteran angler, "Josh Billings," and in years past, many were the excursions made to the neighboring brooks by this prince of the rod, coming home in the early dusk with basket filled

to overflowing, and a good-sized "string" beside. His favorite stream was the West Branch, one of the most charming of the mountain waterways, and entirely different from any of its crystal cousins in its physical characteristics. The Presidential range presents a marked curve, forming the segment of a circle, with a broad valley between; and, standing on the northern shoulder of Mount Washington, this brook is seen far below in the tree-tops a tiny thread of silver. If the ascent is made to the Summit by the carriage-road, after passing the Half-way House, a sharp turn to the left brings one to the rock-strewn plateau of the Ledge, which, treeless and bare of verdure, unless there may be a few scattered tufts of dull-gray feathery-topped grass to relieve its poverty of vegetation, juts out over a frightful precipice, that drops down, down, hundreds of feet into sheer nothingness, to where the giants of the forest have only the likeness of dwarf shrubs. To look down into the gulf below is terrifying to a person of weak nerves. The view from this point is one of uplifting grandeur and beauty. Down the valley are spread out the intervales of Gorham, the villages of Milan and Berlin, with their curling smokes of mills and factories, the Peabody River and its tributaries, and the ever-narrowing pass of the Glen; and beyond all, a chain of lakes and rivers that look like burnished silver in the

bright morning sunshine. Opposite are the symmetrical peaks of Madison, Adams, and Jefferson, — a mighty sweep of wind-blown crags skirted by dark-green forests. A careless movement or a misstep would plunge one down headlong into the empty void below; but to see is to appreciate, and such magnificence of scenery can only be appreciated by a visual experience, for no words can paint the picture here spread out before the wondering and awe-struck visitor. Turning your back on the headwaters of the West Branch, Pinkham's Notch, Tuckerman's and Huntington's Ravines, the Glen Ellis, Conway Intervales, and, farther away, the "golden horn" of Chocorua, are all in view. Silence is golden as one stands in the Presence which Mr. Drake so willingly acknowledges. It is in the basin at the foot of the Ledge that the West Branch takes its rise, and from the Half-way House down to the stream, less than a mile over the sheltered boulders, runs the invisible pathway over which the "inimitable Josh" so frequently went in bygone days to his fishing.

There is nothing so stimulating to one's propensity for trout-fishing as a peep into the grass-lined, well-filled creel of a neighbor: so thought the Doctor, and so I have often thought myself when surveying these treasures of the meadow-streams, when won by some other skill than my own; and when my friend had sufficiently admired my trout,

his proposition to visit the famous West Branch with the coming morrow was greeted with a hearty response. We chose to reach it by the way of Osgood's Spring, over a footpath through the woods the margin of which lay just beyond the low-browed farmhouse across the Peabody from the Glen House. Before sunrise on the following day we were on our way, with our breakfast stowed away in our creels, to be partaken of when we had reached the stream. The sky was clear; not a cloud-sail was in sight, and the air was cool and bracing and full of pure ozone. The fields were wet with dew, and across them ran the long swaths of grass mown the day before, and as yet unraked; and over all lay low down, a thin, diaphanous veil of mist, to make one think of the fairies and their white dancing-floors. Once across the shallow Peabody it was but a short distance to the half overgrown rail-fence, along by the side of which ran the cowpath to the woods, and into which we had soon plunged. Here was utter silence, with nothing to disturb it except the muffled snapping of the dew-moistened twigs under our stout boots.

Among the most pleasurable of outdoor experiences are those gleaned within the deep shadows of the primeval woods, and along the rough-set pathways of some wild, mountainous region like the White Hills of New Hampshire. It is in the

heart of Nature, out of the way of noisy humanity, that one finds the most perfect peace; and then what depths of quiet, what inimitable skill of building and of architecture, what grandeur of design and richness of coloring, what glorious frescoes of blue of sky and white, swift-flying cloud are here; and yet, what hidden mysteries of life lurk beneath these fallen leaves and within the rough rinds of these tall, shapely trees! But we have soon reached the spring, and with a strip of birch-bark for a quaffing-cup we have quenched our thirst; and on we push, stopping only a moment here and there to admire the brilliant scarlet of some maple, the magnificent leaf of the beautiful moosewood, or an exceptionally fine display of toad-stools; but here are armies of creeping things, of insect-life which richly reward a moment's delay, and afford much pleasure and wonderment at the extent and fertility of Nature.

The leaves which strew the ground so thickly, and keep the roots of the trees so well supplied with moist, rich mould, are pregnant with hidden dwellers. Scrape away the light covering of leaf and twig that hides the earth beneath your foot, and here are a pair of tiny snail-shells, as delicately colored as the clouds at sunrise; an earwig wriggles rapidly into his burrow; a huge beetle keeps him company. Right here in our pathway is the symmetrically rounded dome of the big

black wood-ant, the *Formica rufa*. These ants are found in the hollows of the trees oftentimes, and when the trees are cut for firewood in the winter-time, a hollow trunk contains not infrequently large quantities of them, torpid with cold and frost; and I have seen the choppers eat them by the handful! They have a clean acidulous flavor, not unpleasant to the taste, and they were considered by the Indians a great delicacy. The bear adds them to his scanty menu whenever he can. But these ants are to be avoided in warmer weather, as they have a way of making their company decidedly disagreeable, especially when they get into one's clothing or upon one's face or hands. Their sting is a severe one, though not so poisonous as that of some other of the ant species. Like the hornets they are the scavengers of the woods, quick to scent the carrion-feast, and quick to communicate the good luck to their friends; and about which they accumulate in myriad numbers, and from whose devouring appetites nothing but the cleanly picked bones remain. They are carpenters, cutting and sawing the leaves and twigs into tiny bits, out of which they build their homes. An ant-hill is a curious and interesting study. The roof of their domicile, strown with a whitish covering of gravel, is as perfectly rounded as that of the dome of an Eastern mosque, —a city, in truth, peopled with thousands of ant

citizens. None of Nature's insect-dwellers are more active or more sagacious than these toilers who make their homes in the ground or in the decayed trunks of trees. Clannish to the last degree, and imitative of human-kind in many respects, they seem to have a large contingent of laborers, and as well standing armies. A single picket is usually in sight, and no more alert guardsman or more pugnacious insect can be imagined. Any invasion of their domain is quickly discovered, and as quickly reported, when there is sent out a reconnoitring party; and these are swiftly followed by the fighting men. The battle is often a fast and furious one, unless the intruders consult discretion and retire; but often the foraging-party is victorious, when they take possession, slaughtering all their prisoners without distinction of sex. Only the larvæ are left undisturbed, and not unfrequently they are carried away by the victors, to be brought up in their own families.

The smaller species of the ant family are not less pugnacious, though some will not fight at all, rolling themselves up into a ball and feigning death. One cannot observe them closely without granting them to be very intelligent insects.

I have many a time seen the wood-ant marching in countless numbers over the leaves in long black lines and solid ranks, reminding me of a great army on a march. They seem to be divided into

castes, into an aristocracy, into militia, and into hewers of wood and drawers of water. Some of the ant family are not averse to slaveholding, and Darwin makes a very interesting mention of this, to him, unnatural instinct. It is a charming occupation to watch this tiny insect at his work! Any injury to his house is quickly and industriously repaired, and I have seen them push a bit of stone or gravel larger than a pea a considerable distance, tipping it over and over with infinite patience and perseverance. In their work they use their antennæ with a marvellous ingenuity, pushing, pulling, and rolling whatever they wish a long distance. I have seen them, like a body of firemen at a rope, dragging, carrying a twig of the length of five or six inches, and of the diameter of a wheat-straw, some distance to the domicile, and without much difficulty. Their fighting-men are as handsome as the king's grenadiers, and are doubtless of a military race, chosen because of their dusky beauty and shapely strength. I have witnessed many of their battles, and dead or alive the captive is carried within the walls of their fortress, where I have often thought there might be a court of prize and confiscation.

So threading our way through the forest aisles, here and there breaking the gossamer barrier of some spider's weaving, now scaling huge boulders carpeted with the blackest of black mosses, as soft

as the pile of fine velvet, now stooping low down to avoid the bristling lances of the scrub-spruces, that hem the narrow trail so closely in, till the brawl of the noisy river falls on the ear, a few moments later we stand above the broad rock-strewn channel of this now shrunken tributary of the Peabody. But we are to go a mile farther up stream before lunching. What grand scenery greets the vision at every bend and turn of the river, and what hosts of mountain-ash lean out over its pellucid waters! The sun peers over the crest of the mountain to catch us at our breakfast, which passes off without incident, except that the Doctor thought the taste of this New Hampshire river was somewhat peculiar. Its amber color and fine bouquet were especially noticeable. The West Branch must have been a favorite with the Indian, if his love for *strong* waters were historically a fact. The Doctor hastened to make the first throw, but it was in vain. Twenty rods from the scene of our breakfast down stream, and not a sign of a trout has as yet rewarded our patience or skill. What mountain Deity had we offended? The wind blew from the south, and by the almanac the signs were in the belly, and not a nibble as yet!

The Doctor suggested as an offering to the divine anger, that we "spit on the bait!" which done the evil spell was broken, and the next throw

won for each a fine fish. From this out we had no cessation of sport. The river-bed is broad and unevenly paved with beautifully colored rocks of every hue of the rainbow, and between which rush the swift vari-colored waters. How they glint and glisten in the morning sunlight! Here are amber shallows, black, sluggish pools, streaks of snow-white feathery foam, sienna-colored rapids, swirling currents, and hosts of cascades which seem to have caught all the deeper hues of the brilliant sky. On either side are the dark-green draperies of woods that reach up to the brown hazy summits of the stately hills with easy, graceful sweep. There are no shadow-haunted flumes or bottomless depths here as in the Nineteen-mile Brook; no tumultuous roar of angry, rushing waters; but instead, the light, airy trebles and sunny ripples of a laughing stream whose music is of the light-hearted, joyous kind which one hears in reveries and midsummer dreams among the singing-birds and among the orchard-trees. I can convey no idea of the infinite zest, the boyish exuberance, the glowing pleasure, of such an outing. The bright anticipation of its recurrence with each succeeding season relieves the irksomeness of toil, the daily routine of drudgery, the close environment of city life which rounds up the lives of most men. Leaping from rock to rock we make our way over and across and ever down

stream to find ourselves at last beside the larger and deeper Peabody. What strength comes with the inbreathing of this pure mountain air, and what an exhilaration of sense these magnificent outlooks of river-nook and broken mountain outline bring to us at every step; but here we wind in our lines, wash and count our trophies, and how beautiful they are! How firm and shapely each curve, how bright their spots of scarlet, green, and gold, how transparent each crimson fin, and how they glistened and shone, wet and dripping with the ice-cold river water: only the glittering, far-off stars seem brighter and more wonderful.

The highway is just above us, and gaining it we are on our way to the hotel, where we are the heroes of the hour. It was the best catch of the season; but, had we not propitiated the demon of ill-luck as we did, our pleasure might have been greatly lessened. There is a wonderful sense of companionship in the babbling speech of these mountain streams, and in the silence of the night, far away from their slow-rising mists and drifting shadows, their broken utterances come vividly to mind with all the charm and restfulness of reality. Such experiences as one gleans from a day among these mountain brooks makes one better and happier; for are they not of the perfect handiwork of God? They are the unwritten sermons that reach the heart, not through the hearing, but through the

Soul. A few days later, as I left the Tip-top House to descend the loftiest of New England's hills, it was with a heart-throb of sincere regret that I bade farewell to the silver streams which ran outward to the Androscoggin, whose intervales never looked more charming and peaceful than on this midsummer morning. It was a long look, as one takes from parting friends who hope to meet again.

MISTS.

O sweet and fair the Autumn day,
When brown October slowly fills
The woods and vales with purpling mists,
And shadows linger on the hills!
Along the woodland paths the leaves
Drop, silent tokens, at our feet;
So sun and frost make Nature's mood;
God gives the bitter with the sweet.

MISTS.

I.

WHEN a boy I was in the habit of riding occasionally with my father to the distant city, — distant I say: it seemed distant to me at that age, though it was a little less than forty miles from the farm, and to reach it in good season for the market an early start was necessary. I well remember the impressions which my mind took on as we made one stage of the journey and another. About midnight the horse was hitched into the big wagon, well loaded down with garden-truck and fresh, yellow butter from the farm dairy; and, closely tucked about with warm buffalo-robes, we started off on our long journey at a lively pace. The most familiar object by day looks most unfamiliar at night. The highway seems as if its walls and fences had been spread wider, farther apart; the bushes by the roadside have grown with the dense shadows into huge, massy shapes, that reminded me of the descriptions of the genii, — those goblin forms of misty, vaporish outline which abound so freely

in the wonderful tales of the Vizier's daughter, Scheherezade, and which most boys have read at some time or another. The trees loomed up in the gloom of midnight like misshapen giants, full of threatening when the sky was overcast, but when the stars were out the contour of their lofty tops shew more distinctly, but stark and black. What dim perspectives greeted us on every hand, indefinable, indistinct, and uncertain! I could feel the dark as we went into the woods, as if it were something tangible; and what a relief it was to get out of their blackness into the openings! Houses looked like castles as we went by them, and the cattle by the pasture-fences and in the barn-yards seemed to be redoubled in size. The silence is noticeable; the wagon-wheels roll along over the road with a soft, muffled sound, but the hoofs of the horse beat a sharply rhythmic measure as he trots down the hills and over the levels which alternate between. How the sparks flash out to the one side or the other as we bowl down the sharp pitches and over the ledges which crop out along the roadway. Only the fireflies are up at this early hour of the morning; all else of insect-life is asleep. The whippoorwill and owl have gone to bed long ago. So we ride on through the warm atmosphere of the uplands and plunge down into the cooler moisture of the lowlands, and over the loose, sharply rattling planks

of the bridges. This is the hour of rising mists. At the foot of Jack's Hill the pond reaches north a good three miles; and how white it is, as if covered with hoar-frost, — a level floor of snowy-like atmosphere, which leaves its dampness about our clothes and faces, but beautiful beyond comparison as the dawn begins to break over the hills which hem it in. How swiftly it rises to hover reluctantly about the crests of the piny slopes with the first touch of sunshine! The sun is the great disillusionist of fairy romance and of lowland mists. How these filmy coverlets of the stream fly upward with the winds which come with the sun. As the hours grow apace we are getting into Long Meadows; the sky is lighter to the eastward, and our vision is clearer. To the left are the Rattlesnake Mountains, and at their feet lie the fragrant acres of the intervales dotted with dark clumps of alder, which seem to be swimming in a sea of low fog. It comes up over the highway. I hear the rattle and clatter of an approaching team, and we turn out into the bushes by the roadside to let it pass. As it comes into sight around a bend in the road how it towers above us in its misty surroundings! A friendly "Halloa!" and we are once more alone. We hear the singing shallows of the brooks, but we cannot see their waters, for they are hidden beneath slender threads of gossamer whiteness that wind grace-

fully around and among the dusky trunks of the trees to disappear in the deeper shadows beyond. But there is a shimmer of soft crimson flame high up on the sky, and the stars have blown out one by one, till only the morning star is left to welcome the coming dawn. How it pales with the coming light, and how ruddy the horizon! A robin in the orchard at our right whistles a bar or two of song, and then relapses into silence; a moment later and the whole world is listening to a chorus of upland melody, and then a single voice takes up the strain. It is the meadow-lark, and what a wonderful song it is!

A monkish group in sober garb
  The pasture maples stand
  Against the soft, gray sky.
The weathercock wakes with the wind;
  The meadow-mists like fleets
  Of ghostly ships sail by.
Seaward the ripples grow apace;
  Morn, blushing like a girl,
  Betrays with rosy grace
Her sun-god lover by her face.

From dewy nest and meadow bloom
  The brown lark upward soars:
  His dusky-throated song
Falls sparkling down, now faint, now clear,—
  A shower of liquid tones
  Strewn wood and field along,

Like drops of slanting, sunlit rain, —
And breathless lies the earth
To catch the wondrous strain
That wooes the breaking day again.

The lark for the morning, the water-thrush at night, and the day is fitly begun and ended. But there are signs of life at some of the farm-houses by the highway. Thin curling smokes climb upward into the sky from their chimney-tops, and there is a savory smell of burning wood. The farmer with drowsy look comes out with his tin milk-pail. He slowly rubs the sleep from his eyelids, and takes a good, long look at the sky, as if to make sure of the weather. It seems to me as if he is a late riser, — as if he should have been up long ago; but I find there are others farther along the way who have not started their kitchen fires, and whose herds are uneasy to be off to the pastures while they are wet with the savory dew. How slow some men are! There is more or less humbug about these

"Wise saws and modern instances,"

of which here is one that I have heard repeated so many times in boyhood, —

"Early to bed and early to rise,
Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

Like many other things which sound well in the

ears of childhood these sayings grew stale with age. I never discovered much health, wealth, or wisdom in rising before the sun, in summer or winter, to start the fires or milk the cows and get them away to pasture while the older portion of the family got an extra snooze, because I never did it. I never thought the compensation quite equal to the labor performed. I found, as I began to read of people and events, that people made money in various ways, that few people were of perfect health, and that as for the wisdom of some of my neighbors, those who got up the earliest and went to bed at early candlelight had no doubt considerable of farm-lore which had been knocked into them in one way and another, but as for acquired knowledge which comes from books they really had none, nor were they conscious of their lack. Happy ignorance! Man is something more than a machine, to do so much labor, to pile up so much wealth, solely to gratify a base, utterly selfish ambition.

It is not a difficult matter to accept the Darwinian theory of the origin of man, when you meet one of these over-industrious, over-alert, over-grasping farmers who turn night into day, and who run a race with the sun every morning, who push and hurry Dame Nature at every turn with their ploughs, hoes, and scythes, and driving fertilizers; but these "early to bed and early to rise" philos-

ophers are now-a-days of a rare type, for which state of affairs the country lads and lassies should be duly grateful.

But the sun is up, and the morning concert of the robins, the song-sparrows, and the bluebirds is over for the day. What a swift change has come over the sky! It seemed but a moment ago when one could say, —

> "Down from the cloudless zenith the clear sky
> Stretches in rich crescendo of warm light,
> Till at the rim its brilliance blinds the sight
> With its accumulate splendor."

But now the rosy flush has burnt out before the white flashing sunshine. From the high lands I can look down on wastes of forests which stretch far away to the southward horizon, and from the depths of which, sheeny columns of white vapor come up from countless springs and hidden streams, with many a delicate spiral curve and stately column, as if they were the smokes of so many camp-fires. The pathways of the rivers are marked by sinuous bands of low-lying mists, which the cool night-air has been weaving in the looms of the fairies, while over the ponds and wayside pools hang wavering shallows of thin, diaphanous whiteness, which, like the nectar of Hebe's serving to Jupiter, are being carried by some invisible hand up to the courts of the Sun, and with which the

god of Day may allay his thirst. What beautiful forms of cloud cumuli these watery distillations assume as they slowly climb the ladder of the sky! what brilliant hues are theirs!

We can see the birds now, and they follow or precede us, hopping along the rails of the fences or flying from stake to stake. The raspberry-bushes are in full bloom, and overtop the fences with luxuriant growth. They are swarming later in the day with bees and butterflies, and occasionally a humming-bird joins their company for a moment only, darting from blossom to blossom with jerky, almost invisible flight, thrusting his long, slender bill into the fragrant blossoms here and there in search of his insect food. But the most numerous of the frequenters of the roadside are the yellowbirds, or thistle-birds, which scour the walls and orchard fences in troops of half a dozen or more. The yellowbird has been called the "dandy" of the feathered tribes, and in shapely beauty and perfection of color he has no rival. He is a fellow of gregarious habit, and builds in the orchard or in the birches over the roadside wall. If you watch sharply you will see in the fork of the broad-leaved maple a tiny nest, deftly, cunningly woven, with no loose strings hanging. The shreds of grayish birch-bark out of which it is constructed give it the color of the rind of the maple, so it is not easily distinguished;

but it is there, and if you will take the trouble to look into it you will see three or four bluish-white eggs not over a half-inch in diameter. He is not a shy bird, but seems to delight in house-gardens as well as roadside tangles and field stubble. He keeps up a continual chatter as he jerks himself along from bush to bush. He is a bright spot in the landscape.

The mountains are the breeding-places of the summer mists. How they linger with their blandishment of cloud caress about the steep sides and far-away summits, to later in the heat of the day roll down through the valleys in black thunder-gusts and torrents of pouring rain, on their way outward to the sea; what dazzling hot flashes of flame illumine their gloomy depths as they sweep over the woods and fields with their besom of tempestuous storm! What a gathering of the clans of the air, as cloud after cloud overlies each the other, towering majestically above the sun, shutting out little by little its brillance, and what a sultry foreboding lies over the hillsides and pasture-slopes; but after the rain, the sun comes out, and the mists have begun to rise from the woods and meadows, and are not less beautiful as the sun goes down than at dawn. What sweet odors come up from the lowlands with the mist as the day dies out in the west after Nature has taken her bath.

The early days of spring, when the maple-tops have grown ruddy with bursting buds, when the snows have melted from the stubble in the fields, and before the April rains have set in for the spring house-cleaning, when the fields are soft and springy with superabundant wet, and not yet free of frost, are misty days as well. Along the hedges and walls are piled up the deep drifts of winter storms; the ice is not yet out of the ponds, and the woodland slopes are still covered with the coat of winter. How the mist rolls down over the fields and brown tillage-lands, thick and drizzling like fine rain, now high, now low, hiding fences and trees in its opaque vapor. I have stood out on the lawn of the old farmhouse many a thick night listening to the honking of the wild-geese as they went their way in the darkness to the Canada marshes, and when they flew so low down that I could hear the flapping of their wet wings. I have seen many a northward flying flock of geese in the late afternoon spread out against the gray April mists like an old-fashioned crotch-harrow, sweeping lower and lower to alight at last amid the brown stubble of the uplands, and at night and in the morning I have crept stealthily along behind the shelter of the cobble-wall or behind the ragged stump-fence by the pasture, with antiquated queen's-arm musket, a cumbersome flint-lock affair, to get a single shot at these

migratory waterfowl at a fruitlessly long distance. With what breathless anticipation did I peer through the interstices of my shelter, as I crawled so guardedly over the wet ground; but my sport was all of anticipation. The flock seemed nearer in the mist than they were in fact. I could see them plainly enough as they loomed up in the fog, but upon the discharge of my musket they had disappeared as if by magic.

Misty weather is always good mowing weather; the grass cuts easily, and the heat of the hot July sun does not scald and burn as under a cloudless sky. Cutting wet grass is like a desert after a hearty dinner. The scythe will hold its edge a long time without grinding, and then you take your own time about it; the sun is not driving you here and there about the field with rake and pitchfork, and threatening you with low-rolling thunder and swift-shod rain. Stop and pick all the blueberries you wish: what fine flavor they have, freshly plucked from the bushes that lie so thickly in our pathway! Farm-life has its compensations without stint and without number, and fresh fruits plucked afield count as one

II.

If there was anything for which I had a real passion, it was to follow the meadow-brooks. No matter what the work was about the field or farm, the meadows, stretching up and down the broad valley, lay ever temptingly before me, a streak of soft yellowish-green verdure, and a part of the way I could trace the pathway of the brook in the sunshine. I could see the old barns, or rather their slate-colored roofs, so still and deserted most of the year, and I knew that just opposite one of them was a dark pool where the trout congregated, and where I ever went first, and not without ample success. It was with the extreme of boyish delight that I was able to discern to the southward a low bank of gray, leaden-colored cloud as the afternoon wore away. I knew it meant a wet, misty morning for the morrow, and a cessation of farm-work as well. I doubt if I took a proper interest in the farm affairs; but what boy ever does? Time enough when boys get to be men for them to begin the real work of life. Too many boys come up without realizing that they ever had any boyhood at all, and with the boy on the farm it is senseless folly on the part of the parent that he is looked upon as something that should be made to pay its way. Boys are

not machines, but they are too often treated as if they were. Boys have no sense of the fitness of things, and are often unreasonable in their likes and dislikes, but they are only boys, as various-minded as a weathercock, and as breezy and boisterous as a March wind. There is abundant time to build them into men without their being dwarfed by any strait-jacket of Puritan austerity, or by an arid, desert-like existence of an "all-work and no-play" childhood, — a plan of building by which many a boyhood has been made most miserable when it should have been a succession of halcyon days to be remembered with pleasure, and to be looked back to with the single regret that they had not lasted longer.

I used to hear my elders speak of the "dispensations of Providence," as if all that occurred to mankind of good and ill was dispensed by a Divine Immutability. A misty morning seemed to me to be one of those providential happenings, but oftentimes my piscatorial ardor would be seriously dampened, for no sooner would I get into the meadows and fairly at my sport, than the sun would burn suddenly through the clouds, the mist would fall away over the woods, and with a lively sense of the importance of my presence in the corn-patch or hay-field, I would scamper up the woodland cattle-path, up across the pasture to the hill, to find the men busily at work hoeing

or turning the hay to the hot sun. I am afraid at such times my opinion of the weather-clerk's reliability was more or less shaken; but it was no use to grumble over the matter, for I could not change the weather.

At other times I would have the weather on my side, and the whole day to myself; and what a brief but delightful dwelling in Utopia it was! What an acquaintance I struck up with the birds and muskrats in the blossoming meadows, nor were these children of Nature so shy of me as they seem to be now-a-days. I have no doubt but that they took the barefooted, homely-clad urchin who had come so quietly among them, and who stood so patiently, so purposeless, among the tall flowering rue and bluejoint in the open spaces by the alder-lined shallows of the brook, and which reached their rank growth almost to the brim of his ragged straw hat, to be as much of a vagabond as themselves. How often I have been startled out of a dreamy reverie, as if a shock had been transmitted to me by some powerful battery, as I stood angling in the shadow of some round-topped elm. It is only the sudden plunge of a huge green bull-frog from the high bank into the brook, the unexpected appearance of a mink or of a muskrat swimming down stream, leaving a brown trail of muddy water behind him. The day is crowded with charming episodes.

I soon got to know all the birds, the thrushes, the scarlet-tanager, the cedar-birds, or, as many call them, the cherry-birds, the red-polls, and the Finch family as well, warblers and all. Altogether, they kept up a constant chatter the whole day through.

I would often call the crows by imitating the owl. A half-dozen clever imitations of the hooting of this prowler of the night-woods, and what a gathering of the crows in the hemlock-tops overhead would come at my imitation of his single note. One by one they would alight upon the dead spurs and topmost limbs of these tall trees, peering with a keen scrutiny into the shadows beneath as if to discover his owlship in his hiding. The owl is a coward by day, and how these black carrion-eaters would annoy him did they once set their sharp eyes upon him! When out with my gun I have frequently used the dismal cry of the owl to call this parson-looking fellow with his companions, a dozen or more at a time, about me in the woods, shooting one or two easily, but never more than that at one time. They are a very wary, suspicious bird, and it is generally a long shot that one gets when crow-hunting, but I could get nearer them on a wet, misty day than on a fair one. Hunting crows after the corn is planted is good sport. The tallest trees in the woods, the pines and hemlocks, are always selected by them

in which to build their nests, which are rather compact affairs, though sometimes spanning two feet in width. They are made of quite large sticks, and upon these are built up layers of coarse twigs from the tips of the fir and hemlock limbs, inwoven with strips of bark from the birch and cedar, and sometimes with moss, the whole being neatly lined with beech-leaves. It is quite an ingenious affair, take it altogether, — much more so than we might imagine from our knowledge of the habits of this bird. Three or four eggs are laid in the nest, which do not vary much from the dimensions of a smallish hen's egg. The crow's egg is of a clean, fresh greenish color, sometimes having more or less of a brownish tinge, and spattered with blotches of warm brown. They breed in great numbers; but as birds I do not think they have one redeeming quality. They are robbers in the most emphatic sense of the term, and not only do they plunder the cornfield of its sprouting germs, but they rob the nests of the Sparrow, the Thrush, and the Warbler, of both eggs and young, upon which to feed their own offspring. They breed in colonies, and make the woods resound with their noisy clamor the whole morning through. The young crows are very noisy, filling the air with their grating squawks when disturbed by any strange sound, and are thereby easily located and as easily captured, if they have not left the nest.

Growing rapidly, they soon begin to fly short distances, and it is not long before they have learned the wary, meddlesome ways of their elders.

Trout-fishing and crow-hunting is the regular thing for June in the woods of Maine. It is close-time to everything else, for field and run shooting do not come on until August, and only after the month of September has come in does one have the unrestricted run of the woods; but what a fusilade awakes the silences of the woodland from this out! Only the gray skies and flying snows put an end to the slaughter of the game-birds. Every boy who has a popper is out scouring the meadows, the wet runs, and the sunny slopes, where the needles of the sapling-pine lie thickest and the purplish-red thorn-plum grows largest and juciest, for the plumy partridge. The gray squirrels in the beech-woods by the cornfield do not escape his attention. I know one pot-hunter who, with a dog to tree the birds, shot in a single season nearly two hundred partridges. The woods in that section were fairly depopulated by this one man.

The true sportsman gives his game a fair chance for life, and shoots it, if at all, awing. Partridge-shooting, with a well-trained dog to flush the birds, is rare sport, and abundant in zest and exercise; and without setter or pointer, it is the

gunner's skill against the wit and instinct of the wariest of birds. Without a dog, a bag of three or four birds is all the best of hunters can expect in a single day, if the brood has been well scattered by other hunters. To tell a partridge from a pine-knot sticking up amid the leaves oftentimes requires the sharpest of eyesight.

But the regal mists of the year come with the mellow days of Autumn, when the heats of summer are beginning to abate, when the apples in the orchard are blushing with ruddy ripeness. Red-cheeked apples and red-cheeked boyhood, what is one without the other? The fruit of the old Astrachan apple-tree is as beautiful now as then, but the old-time zest is gone. They do not taste the same. The old Harvey tree throws its lichen-frescoed limbs out over the low-gaped wall, full of luscious, streaked fruit; but the flavor of boyhood seems lacking. How we watched for the falling fruit, scampering down to the trees through the grass dripping wet with the early morning dew in our eagerness for the first dropping apple, and how dextrously we dodged the worm-holes with our teeth as we devoured this first half-matured specimen of apple-kind.

But how quiet are these Fall days! From mid-September on, a month or more, is the most charming season of the year. It is the idyllic consummation of robust Summer's promise. What

dreamy repose, what tranquillity, broods over hill and valley! Nature is full of suggestion of sleep, except for the sounds of domestic life about the farm. How slowly the snowy whiteness of the clouds goes sailing through the blue of the sky. They seem hardly to move, as if they were anchored amid-stream, becalmed with the rest of Nature. What a suggestive picture it is!

> Indoors is rest and quietude;
> Across the threshold cool winds blow,
> And 'twixt my lintel-frame of wood
> Is framed a landscape of Corot;—
> A dreamland wrought with subtile charm
> Of soft blue sky and drowsy farm,
> Inwoven with the song of vibrant thread
> And whirring wheel by household goddess sped.

When the summer-work was over we would go to the fulling-mill at a neighboring village to get the soft white woollen rolls which had been carded from the spring fleeces, and which was always considered quite an event by the youngsters of the family, who regarded the machinery in the old mill with great curiosity and interest. I remember the fuller as a great practical joker, a man of strange quips and pranks, and who was a favorite with the farmer-wives of the section. The big spinning-wheel had its own corner, and woe to the urchin who interfered with the sanctity of its surroundings! but I am afraid its broad-

banded periphery got many a clandestine slap and twirl when mother was out of sight. In fact I know it did, and to the infinite satisfaction of the youthful culprit. The reel-stand was another coveted plaything, but the old spinning-wheel possessed the superior attraction. In the stillness of the short afternoons its busy, whirring melody could be heard for some considerable distance. The music of the spinning-wheel alternated at unequal periods with the waltz-like measure of the cumbersome wooden loom in the woodshed chamber, where the homely all-wool blankets and Canada grays, the real home-spuns for the boys and girls, were slowly and laboriously wrought. What fun to throw the great shuttle as the sleys went up and down with one pedal or the other! Here was romance indeed!

Most of the birds had gone south a few days in advance of the first frosts, and how diligently we watched for them, and with what care did we cover the tender-fruited vines in the garden with odd hay-caps and quilts; even the weekly newspaper was pressed into service on these occasions. It was one kind of farm husbandry. We had no hammocks then to swing between the elms, but there was the carpet of soft grass, dotted with the shadows of the door-yard trees. How often have I lain along the sloping lawn with face to the sky watching the cloud-yachts racing from west to

east with only the helmsman of the wind to steer them, and what stretches of canvas they spread to the swift air-currents! What a succession of bright, sunny days and cool nights, and how refreshing they were after the restless tossings and broken slumber of torrid August. At this time of the year, when a storm is brewing, the atmosphere is remarkably clear, except that the outline of the woods is somewhat softened by a warm low-lying haze. Otherwise it is one of the alert days when the sense of outdoor enjoyment is at concert-pitch, when Nature seems in perfect tune, and more conscious of herself. We throw books aside, and lounge about the orchard-slopes back of the red farmhouse under the apple-trees. What a medley of sound comes up from the wooded valley below, where the choppers among the hemlocks are finishing the work of June, swamping logging-roads to the river, or parading the felled timber for the logging-teams. I can hear their "halloos!" distinctly. There is an intermittent discharge of guns as the sportsmen beat the covers of birch and alder for woodcock or the pine-levels for partridge. Half-way down the pasture-side is a broad ledge of granite, and just at its lower edge are grouped together a few red-oaks and maples, and in their tops is gathered a conclave of jays; their discordant notes make but a jangled tune at best. Like some people, their speech betrays their disposition.

Lying there on the same orchard-slopes in the shadows of the same old wide-branching trees less than a year ago, with the woods and meadows spread out below me, with the broad lake of the Sokokis shining misty-like in the autumn sunshine far away to the south, the snow-capped peak of the loftiest of the White Hills, with its darker blue foot-hills filling the west, with many a rolling ridge and valley between, —

> I heard as in an old-time dream
> Of long midsummer afternoon
> The broken measure of a stream, —
> A rhyme of Nature set to tune.
> Beyond the orchard-fence the tree-toad sang
> At intervals with strident notes, that rang
> Out prophecies of damp sea-mists and coming rain, —
> And o'er the woods the wild loon's trumpet strain; —

and later on at nightfall the moon came up with the mists that swept with a lofty stride over the roofs and tree-tops back toward the mountains, to return a day or two later laden with raw, cold wet. Rain is one of the beneficent events in nature. Day after day, through the long, sultry summer-time, the sun has been drinking dry the springs and smaller rivers. The surface moisture disappeared long ago. The earth is like a sponge, pressed dry, but with the heavy autumn rains its thirst is slaked. The farm-wells and lowland springs are reinforced for the long rainless winter.

Happy is the farmer whose cattle do not have to plough their way to the pasture watering-places through deep, drifting snows! An abundant supply of water at the house and barn is one of the economies of the farm.

III.

THERE is rarely any part of the year more enjoyable than autumn. The season is generally a succession of clear days, — days of such perfectness that at any other time they would be characterized as individual weather-breeders, breeders of storms, — but I doubt if much faith can be put in such as storm prophecies. When such remarkably fine days follow each other with the same enjoyable repetition the weather-wise persists in regarding the last, if it be the much better day, as a precursor of rain; but for all that, the rain does not come, only "hard weather" instead. I well remember an expression one of these assistant weather-clerks was accustomed to use when his weather prophecies came to naught. Hat in hand he would scan the clear blue above, and listen for the sounds from the woods; he would hold up one finger to the breeze to get its direction, or would call you to look at an ant-hill to note the extraordinary activity of its dwellers, and to numberless other signs, only to exclaim, in his perplexity,

"Well, this 'ere 's masterly weather; beats all natur', sir; kink in the chain somewhere, depend on 't." Our wonderfully clear days, whenever they occur, are generally crisp, dry days, and are not at all premonitory of storm, though storms sometimes follow closely upon the heels of a single fine day, — storms of long continuance and abundant in wet. I have known many a rare day to be followed by a series of rarer days, the atmosphere of which was so clear, so perfectly transparent, that far-away objects could be discerned with marked distinctness, when sounds smote upon the ear with phenomenal articulateness, even when borne from far-away places. All sounds have a bell-like quality on such days, which enables them to pierce the air arrow-like, clear, crisp, and penetrating. Many a time have I rode along the highway when I could distinguish the conversation of the people in the farmhouses, as its sound came out through the half-raised windows, and which I have no doubt was carried on in the ordinary tone of voice. So I have caught bits of the conversation of the hay-makers at work on the hill-slopes. I remember an old-fashioned clock which has occupied the same narrow shelf ever since I first saw it in my boyhood, whose silvery-toned strokes I have many a time counted in the lowlands nearly half a mile away, as it told by its accentuated speech the time of day to the house-

hold whose master had wound up its heavy weights every night for a half-century, with few exceptions; and it was a fairly common stroke, ordinarily speaking. On such occasions the air was in a state of perfect calm.

Transmission of sound depends in degree upon atmospheric conditions, coupled with the advantage of favorable wind-currents, though in general the motion of the air is hardly noticeable, if at all. On some days Nature's batteries are in better working order than on others, and the invisible telephones of the air transmit messages without that difficulty so apparent on other days, when Nature generates less of electricity.

There are days when it seems as if all the wires were down, when farm sounds hesitate to jump the walls and fences which bound the home domain, when the air is full of barriers and insurmountable obstructions, when the old tin dinner-horn, blow hard as you may, falls far short of the field or meadow. Have you ever tried to halloo on such a day? How choked and smothered-like your voice, as if you were cooped up in a box or an empty barn, or some other limited space! A boy, amid-field, I have caught the softened, prolonged note of the locomotive whistle coming to me over a ten-mile stretch of field, forest, and pond, as I wrought in the morning sunshine with plough or scythe. My attention arrested, I could hear the

clatter of the distant car-wheels as well. The enunciation of sound was wellnigh perfect, but this occurred only in the absence of any wind motion, or when the current set toward me from the eastward, and then always in the morning or in the late afternoon, but never at midday. Frequently after a storm is over, but before the clouds have begun to clear away, the same phenomena will be observed. Upon every occurrence of like character the field-workers would prophesy rain: "That means rain," or "Rain to-morrow"; and the plans for a rainy morrow, or day after, go on with great activity; but no rain came, nor was it a "dry time," when "all signs fail." When the clouds are ripe with rain the rain comes, and not until then; when their cisterns are full the earth gets the overflow, and that is all. Nature never exhausts herself with needless giving. She is thriftiness itself. See how she gathers up the mists at morn and night to send them down in pattering drops elsewhere despite the complainings of mankind! Nature has but little consolation for these human weather-builders and chronic grumblers. When I hear some people talk about the weather, I think of one of Parson Sam Jones's sayings, "Many farmers would like to swap sides with God. They would like to put him in ploughing, and let them do the raining and shining."

Each day is an individual type different in some

degree from another. They are like people, they carry a general resemblance to their kind, but are utterly unlike each other, — a total of sun, cloud, and wind, which means much or little to the professional weather-wise. I have heard the tree-toad many an afternoon in the summer, but he was a poor prophet if he was singing up the rain; so with the cuckoo. The wind bloweth wheresoever it listeth, and so with the wet in the clouds, it drops when and where it will. There is a great deal of the winter muskrat-theory in this foretelling of storms by the particular complexion of one day or another. Even barometric disturbances are not always proof of coming foul or fair weather, as everybody knows who has ever hung a barometer for any length of time to his door-post. The weather is a combination of freaks, with precedents of a most uncertain character. He is a rare philosopher who with uncomplaining spirit takes it as it comes, believing that Nature is a sufficient law unto herself, with her seasons of wet and dry, of scant apparel and of abundant livery.

With the ending of the first week in September, those most uncertain days of the year, when Sirius is at the head of stellar affairs, are over. The Dog-star abdicates of necessity, and none too soon for the comfort of his subjects, who have grown disgusted with such a vacillating, temporizing, characterless régime. It is neither the one thing nor

the other, neither sunshine nor storm, but rather an agglomeration of all that is irresolute in the weather. Its air-currents are roily with smoky, misty sediment, which is ever settling down upon the hills and choking the valleys with its turbidness.

No need to study the weather now. No misty mornings, when you feel certain of rain one moment and of sunshine the next, getting neither. No more ebb and flood of dense fog-tides and drizzling sea-mists swept up toward the hills on raw east-winds. The days of alternate east-winds and of scalding suns have ebbed slowly to the south, and in their stead have come the golden days of Autumn, with bright, clear skies, and cool, starry nights, when the harvest-moon hangs itself nightly above the fields, — the sign for the ingathering of the crops, when the corn-shuckings or country husking-parties are to inaugurate their rounds of rustic gayety. The cornfields hold their bright green color into September, when their tossing plumes take on a reddish tinge, and their downy silks, the emerald floss on each ripening ear, fades out into the hue of old-gold, and the long, graceful leaves grow paler, with deep purplish streaks running from the stalk to their tips. The kernel is in the milk; but a month later, the farmer, with sharp, gleaming sickle, is at work afield, and hill after hill, standing stalwart in the mellow October sun, lies where its shadows have fallen through

the long summer, flat upon the brown earth among the thick-trailing pumpkin-vines that have just begun to blacken with the early frosts. Gathered into bundles, and tied up with some of these same pumpkin-vines, they are set up about the old wooden "shocking-horse," their yellow spindled tops bound firmly about with a slender slip of withe-rod; then, drawing the long cross-pin, and carefully removing the "horse," the corn-shock is built. So the farmer goes over his field until the corn is "shocked," when the barren rows, with their garnishment of gray weeds, their blackened vines and bitter wormwood, lend their more sober suggestions of the waning year.

How the bluejays fly from one end of the field to the other, shouting "Jay, jay, jay!" "Wheow, wheow, wheow!" or "Pe-e-n, pe-e-n, pe-e-n!" This last note is a peculiarly beautiful one, and when emitted in the woods, or in the lowland meadows, has a renewed charm. It is of a wonderfully clear timbre, and flies far through and over the autumn woods. It is one of those notes which one in the country learns to associate with the sound of partridge-drumming and with mellow, yellow atmospheres, with stilly afternoons and woodland silences. Once heard it is never forgotten by any one who has half a heart for Nature, but this single bell-like note is the only thing this feathered thief has to recommend himself to our notice, except his brilliant plumage.

A cornfield is one of the picturesque things about the farm. A patch of warm brown in a field of russet green, and all about its edge are ranked in single-file the dusky, rain-blackened bean-stacks, like so many outposts or pickets. Over the cornfield are thickly strewn the golden globes of the pumpkin, in and between the regularly laid out rows of shocks a-drying in the wind. What queer shapes these corn pyramids take on day by day as the rain beats them down! Here are some with sides bent in as if courtesying to its neighbor, here are fat old women in huge skirts and yellow waterproofs, and Indians with feathered head-dress tossing in the breeze; one in particular looks like a pair of dancers awhirl in the dizzy mazes of a waltz or galop. At its farther edge the field is bounded by a "stab-and-run" fence, each rail and stake making a sharp black line against the golden haze of the sky that makes the horizon of the hill-slope. So the corn ripens in wind and sun till the farmer piles its rustling stalks and golden treasure into the old ox-cart to be carried down over the long hill to be dumped, load after load, into the long, narrow floors of the barns. The whole length of one side of the floor is walled up with fragrant mows of hay.

The unhusked corn in the great floors lies four or five feet in depth, and if not husked out rapidly will "heat," and the corn will become mouldy and

worthless for man or beast. Invitations are sent out to the young farmer-folk to come to the husking. It is as much a season of merry-making as of work, and the invitations are eagerly accepted. But what a busy time for the housewife! What pots of baked-beans, what pans of brown-bread, and what dozens of pies of pumpkin, apple, and mince, go into the huge brick oven! what kneadings of pastry and of fresh, flaky crust occupy the intervening time of preparation! What bustling to and fro of matronly housewife and red-cheeked maid in anticipation of the household event of the year, and what secret errands the boys have run these last two days to the grocery at the "Corners"! The house breathes the delicate perfume of plum-puddings, of pies and pastry, and of steaming baked-beans, as if Thanksgiving had come prematurely; and what a dainty perfume it was! Lubin has no extract whose odor can approach it, — this Epicurean fragrance of a typical New England farm kitchen. Call it a *smell* if you will, but later years have found no substitute for the homely sweets of boyhood, and they never will for me. No blaze ever looked so cheery as that which gleamed out from the wide mouth of the old-fashioned brick oven, with its cord-wood sticks crackling so musically within, and when its fires went down, and the embers were raked out and piled up on the hearth of the big fireplace beside

it, what a dull red glow stained its overarching walls as they slowly cooled before the mistress should come with her brimming pots and dishes, which were, like the three worthies, to be tried as they never were before. What flavor, what piquancy of taste, the old oven lends to these viands of the true New England table! and to the boy and girl of those days they taught some very simple likings, but likings which were never to be forgotten, wherever their lot in life may have taken them.

The day dawns magnificently, but the hours crawl with snail-like pace toward the sunset. Every house in the neighborhood has struck up an anticipatory note of preparation, of lover and maiden, of the glutton, who always invites himself, and who, though uninvited, succeeds in making himself useful, and of the younger married people, who have not forgotten the generous hospitality of their host and hostess on former occasions, and its accompanying jollities. The sun is down, and the big round moon is up. Hardly has the dreamy autumn twilight set in than the teams come driving up the steep roadway to the farm-house, singly and by twos and threes; what stalwart young men and what buxom farmer-girls, in their plain garb of calico and homespun, "fixed up" for the husking. By eight o'clock the work begins at the barn in earnest. Opposite the hay-

mows the huskers array themselves with chair, box, or milking-stool, and now and then there is a lively scuffle between some of the young men for a place beside some one of these comely country girls, whose personal charms have made her more attractive and sought after; and the successful fellow wins the noisy plaudits of his companions. It is all in fun, however, and the young woman appeases the disappointed rival by allowing him to see her home later in the evening. The country girl is as much a diplomat as her cousin of the city, and will oftentimes lead her by an arm's-length, if not more. None are shrewder in matters of love than she. It is instinct more than accomplishment.

Behind the huskers are the lintels or tie-ups, where the cattle stand in unwonted quiet, forgetting to chew their ruminant cuds in the curiosity aroused by this noisy activity. Their horns clash with sharp, querulous sound against the hornbeam stanchions as if of questioning at the uproar in the big floors, and one by one they lie down with a big snort of satisfaction, and relapse into sleep and silence.

At intervals along the haymows pitchforks are stuck, from the ends of which hang the sperm-oil lanterns, a half a dozen or more, and which light up the scene quite brilliantly. What a Rembrandtesque picture it is! The light flares into

the darkness with strong lateral rays. Above and below the lantern-flames light up but dimly. What a study of high lights and of deep shadows! The poultry hardly understand this invasion of their domains, and from the great beams which are in shadow, and which seem to be a great ways above the floor, come notes of complaining from the flock as some ringing peal of laughter awakes the echoes of the dusty rafters. The husking goes on rapidly; baskets are filled with swift repetition, and the husked stalks are thrown upon the scaffolds, where they are dextrously stowed away.

The finding of a red ear by one of the girls is a signal for all the boys to take the toll of a kiss from the lips of the blushing damsel. Some of the more bashful maidens, if by chance they came across one of these waifs of osculatory fortune, would put the dreaded ear surreptitiously behind them, but in so doing they seldom escaped the sharp eyes of their companions, who were ever on the lookout for such happenings; for the girls were considered fair game at these country huskings. Occasionally a smut-ball plucked from some mongrel stalk would go shying across the barn, to leave a black smooch upon the face or white shirt-front of some dandified fellow, — for there are dandies in country as well as in town, — and his confusion and evident irritation were richly enjoyed.

The husks are pulled, or rather stripped, from the

last ear; and what a race there is for the house to get at the water and towels! and then the supper is served piping hot, with an abundance of fragrant coffee and the rarest of cream; and what comical episodes followed in its train! Husking is a great whetter of youthful appetites, and the inroads made by the boys and girls into the ample array of eatables may well be imagined, from the fact that the tables were often cleared of everything edible, and yet none went away hungry.

After the supper, all lent a hand in clearing the old kitchen of its furniture, and the thumbing of a violin-string gave hint of what was to follow. The musician of the neighborhood had brought his fiddle along with him, and as he got its strings into tune the boys were selecting their partners and getting into position. A kitchen break-down is one of the bygone amusements. It is only in those sections of the country where much of the primitive in society remains that the pastime is now indulged in. It is a rollicking sort of an affair, full of virile action, and not much akin to the fashionable dancing-party of the present day. Denman Thompson, as "Uncle Josh," gives one a fair idea of its exaggeration of movement, and yet those who have experienced the exhilarations of those far-away days will tell you that the modern ways of Terpsichore's children are flat and insipid, with their mincing steps and full-dress manners.

Never myself much of an enthusiast as regarded this genteel art, or rather accomplishment, I never failed, however, to derive great enjoyment as one of the on-lookers at these hilarious events, — for they were hilarious to a degree, — and never was my fill of mirth so overflowing at its brim as when the fiddler had mounted the deal-table in the kitchen, with his stool, and after a preliminary scraping and drawing of his bow, as if to make sure of his ground, he had started off with the rollicking, tearing, half-lunatic "Virginia Reel," and the boys and girls, taking the cue, made the most of its lively sentiment and quaint movements. The fiddler was an oddity himself, and whatever he played seemed to partake of much of his personality. His every movement was provocative of mirth, and his contortions of bowing bordered upon the ridiculous. How his eyes twinkled with suppressed mirth as the fun grew more fast and furious!

What grand places these old country kitchens were for a country frolic, with their spacious rooms and dark wainscoted walls, with their dingy, smoky ceilings! This old kitchen which I have in mind would accommodate three quadrille sets easily. On one side was a deep fireplace, with wide flaring jambs, its bricks worn smooth, ruddy, and soot-stained. It seemed an alcove where a half-dozen people might stand erect, with

only the clear sky looking down into the chimney-top above them, and above ran the long narrow mantel, where sat a row of rough tallow-dips, which were run in tin moulds by the housewife, a dozen at a time, and which lighted the room but dimly with their flickering, sputtering flames, the snuffing of which kept some one busy most of the time clipping here and there with the old long-handled iron snuffers, most likely an heirloom from some former generation, at their burned and toppling wicks. This was the light of other days, but it served its purpose well. Our rugged, hard-working ancestors were not so particular about their bedtime as their descendants are, and men were more honest then than now. Those were times when the latch-string hung always in plain sight on the outside of the door, night as well as day.

The frosts were whitening the fields and pastures without in the cool October night, but the blaze on the broad hearth had been allowed to go down, so only the smouldering embers shone dully-like out upon the worn floor of spruce. A long, black crane swung its arm straightly across the dull red coals, black and shapely in its strength, and pregnant with the romance of many a Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner, speaking loudest in its gloomy silence of a bygone race who had hung it with stout and wide-eyed staple to the side of

the chimney, no doubt with humble and pious invocation. What sights of homely revellings and rugged cheer it had looked out upon! What stories of the backwoods and of early settlement are bound up within its staid inaction of to-day; for it has swung here since the roof-tree of pine was planted, and that was generations ago, when the broad level highway beside its door was hardly better than a woodland path. Overhead were long poles reaching from one end of the room to the other, suspended on iron hooks or staples; and stretching across from one to the other were hosts of sun-tanned loops or strings of cored apple, drying for household use, or for the market at the seaport, which lay some thirty miles beyond the hills at the south. What a grateful fragrance of orchard blossoms they lent to the room with its low ceiling! What a delicate odor dropped down from those festoons of domestic cheer! Hardly an orchard-tree but has lent of its bounty, its wealth of fruitage, to this mellow garnishing of the old kitchen. What a delightful romance of primitive farm-life it was, that tinged the shifting lights and shadows of this scene with a never-to-be-forgotten zest and pleasure. Conventionality was in utter abeyance. In fact, it was unknown. It was unnecessary, for there were no strangers within the gates; it was purely a neighborhood affair, and mirth ruled the hours into the morning not infrequently.

The signal for the breaking up of the husking-party was deferred to the last moment. There were no dance-cards, with tiny nickle-tipped pencils and dainty dangling ribbons, in those days. The boys and girls went to dance and to have a good time; and have a good time they did, with abundant spirit and grace. Nothing of the kind was needed, though there was many a quiet understanding betwixt lad and lassie which lasted through life oftentimes.

On the old deal table in the corner of the kitchen was a huge tray of ruddy-cheeked apples, and a good-sized mug of sweet cider, newly made in honor of the occasion. To keep them company was the armless, backless chair where the fiddler sat, coaxing one tune and another from his violin, beating time loudly with one foot, and calling off figure after figure. The boys and girls stand expectant in their places, and "Ready all!" says the prompter, and then came the exhilarating strains of Durang's Hornpipe, Fisher's Hornpipe, of quaint old Money-Musk, of Rob Roy, and of numerous other tunes common to those days, when the French dancing-master, M. Rideau, taught the tripping art at the little hamlet in Maine where Hawthorne passed a part of his childhood. What a cutting of "pigeon's wings," what "double-shufflings" and shaking of cow-hide boots, — for they were fashionable in those days; what a snap-

ping of calico skirts, as some lively youngster took his partner down the centre to make the turn at the foot of the set, to bring her back flushed and panting with the exercise. No wonder our mothers grew buxom with such homely jollity. What a "laugh and grow fat" philosophy it was! What a ruddy glow bloomed out upon the cheek when the last strain died away, and the violin was silent.

It has grown light in the east, and the moon is low down in the west; the kitchen has settled into its accustomed quiet, and the household is asleep. The corn is husked, and to-morrow is to be carried to the floor under the woodshed rafters to season before going into the cribs. The house-cat has a preoccupied look now-a-days, as she wanders from kitchen to corn-loft, and the squirrels and mice find many of their well-laid plans to "gang agley." What a scampering over the corn by these rodents, as puss appears upon the scene! what interruptions of feasts clandestine, as she leaps with noiseless bound amid her lawful prey!

But what a change has come over the landscape with the October frosts! What golden hues the summer mists have taken on! What painter this, whose

> "Touch hath set the wood on fire
> Whose falchion pries the chestnut-burrs apart?
> It is the Frost, a rude and Gothic sprite."

The mists that, as Edith Thomas says, all the summer night lie along the river-marsh,

> "And at their looms swift shuttles ply,
> To weave them nets wherewith the streams to drain,
> And often in the sea they cast their seine,
> And draw it, dripping, past some headland high,"

have grown white, and lie along the stubble in the fields, and low down among the sedge and bull-rushes in the swamps; but as the sun comes up they are let loose and hang about the margins of the woods and over the slopes that lead up to the summits of the hills. What tints of opal and of amethyst they hold within their magic warp and woof; what topaz glories crown the autumn days; what tuneful silences lull the midday hours. With what subtle arts has Nature wrought this beauty for herself of earth and sky is known alone to God, whose handmaiden Nature is. It is for man to read the lesson with his heart, and then to tell his fellow-man.

These autumn mists are the mists of June grown older. This mellow atmosphere, these days of old-gold studies of tree and shore, of soft, yellow, shimmering mists, of half-lights among the woods, where the leaves drop thickest, and of occasional clear gray skies, are the rareripes of the whole year. They stay with us until the Indian Summer has come and gone, until the earth has closed her

pores with iron bands of frosts; and with the first spit of snow they come back, the airy sprites of the clouds, to whiten all the fields, where in the blossoming summer-time they had many a curvet and romp with the winds, and many a blushing caress from the sun. Sometimes they slip the leash of winter, and in a single night gild the trees, the birch and wayside hazel-bushes, the rocks and fences, not forgetting even the ragged pine-stumps in the pasture, with a marvellous fretwork of crystal splendor, that flashes in the morning sunshine from every crest and pinnacle, — the romance of another world. It is only for a day, and the glory of the frozen mists is nipped "in the bud." Like the birds, the mists are akin to warmer weather, and with them they haunt meadow and upland, the favorites of the fairies and of mankind.

BLACKBERRY-VINES.

For him who tends the tireless loom
Of years without repining,
The world is full of song and bloom,
The skies are full of shining;
Ana they who catch its tuneful strain,
Or breathe its summer sweetness,
May homeward drive the creaking wain
Of autumn's rare completeness.

BLACKBERRY-VINES.

I.

THERE is nothing in the round of country life abounding in more lively zest or more pleasurable exertion than an excursion to the blackberry slopes in the late summer, when the season is at its flood, — when the sun hangs at midday directly overhead, and drops the heavy weight of its heat straight down into the meadows, where the mowers are finishing up the season's haying. Along the uplands the winds blow up cool in the afternoon, but the birds of song seem to have lost courage. The bobolink is silent for once, and it is only in the woods that we may listen to anything that would pass for a song under the skies of June. The catbird and thrush keep up their notes, though less generous of them as the season grows into the mellowness of the first autumn month. I suppose they are like all Bohemians who have gleaned field after field in search of new enjoyments, — they have had their fill of New England life, and are already planning their

migratory journey. They must be very busy with their thought, to grow so stingy of their song.

The blackberry is the last of all the wild berries to ripen; and what luscious fruitage lurks amid its low-trailing vines along the farm boundaries, over-running the cobble-stone half-wall, its half-rail fence oftentimes serving as a trellis against which it leans with a graceful abandon. The blackberry is a saunterer by the wayside margins and country roads, where you will meet it at almost every turn if you will but take the trouble to scrutinize the fences. The high-bush grows in the interstices of stake and rail, by some white-flowering thorn, or in the midst of a wild tangle of briar close to the edge of the wheel-rut, where every passing team gives it a swish with its loosely rattling spokes. It is a magnificent grower; like the wayside tramp it is, it has a wonderful reserve force in its roots; for break it down, plough it up, freeze the life out of it, when the tramp season opens, up comes our blackberry-vine as stout and vigorous as ever; its bright purple stalks, virile and full-blooded, creep up day by day to overtop the tallest of the highway fences. What a vagabond, what a wayward wilding, this child of Nature is! Often I have searched for the plump, juicy fruit of this bramble when out with gun or rod, and one never knows in what secluded nook or sunny opening it waits

for his coming in the closing days of August or in the earlier days of mild September. Very unexpectedly it reaches out across your path as you make some jaunt through the woods or over the hills, its brilliant leafage tinged with the richest dyes of crimson and purple, with top heavily bowed down under its dusky burden. In these black, glistening shapes, so much like an old-fashioned straw beehive in miniature, is concentrated the voluptuousness of summerhood; and in the graceful sweep and bending lines of these vines, thick with sharp, dangerous spines that prick and tear without mercy, the quality of sensuousness in Nature finds its perfect expression. Not infrequently it grows to the height of ten and twelve feet; and right royal is its blossoming in June, its tops making a mass of petals as white as the driven snow. A strange freak of Nature is it not, that the blackberry flower should be so much after the pattern of the snowflake, while its fruit is of such a rich dusky purple? Nature is full of quips and pranks and of precious secrets, which are well hidden within the mystery of her silences. They are as blind to men as were the secrets which Cassim Baba thought to discover with his "Open Wheat!" — "Open Barley!" — for few have the "open sesame" to the treasures which Nature has in her keeping. It is said that love will go where it is sent; the same is true of the secrets of the

woods, the streams, the plants and living things as well, — the harder we press them for an answer to our curious questionings the more knowledge they grant us, the more they tell us of themselves.

A high-bush blackberry jaunt in my boyhood days was something to be pleasurably anticipated. It meant a day on the steep slopes of Porcupine, a rugged peak some three miles to the northwest of the farm, — a natural pyramid or landmark, stoutly built up on all sides with huge ramparts of rock, and crowned, with the exception of a few openings of stunted pasturage along the lower half of its base, with leafless, storm-beaten tree-trunks that stood stark and silent and fire-blackened, pointing straight skyward as they have always since I can remember. Years ago a holocaust of fire swept up over this mountain. It was in the latter part of the summer-time, and for weeks there had been no rain. The scurf of leafy deposit which had been a half-century accumulating beneath its thick growth of pine and birch made a fuel apparently unquenchable once ignited. The blaze once underway soon became a grand conflagration, which was only checked by the highway that bounded the farther side of the mountain. I remember the event. For many days the mountain-top was hidden in the dense yellow smoke of its burning woods; and at night the scene was one of surpassing beauty and grandeur!

But when the rain came the smoke cleared away; and the once green summit of Porcupine was a mass of blackened rock, thickset with bristling spars of charred, fire-scarred forest-trees — a giant Porcupine in truth.

What a bleak spot is this crest of Porcupine, when

> "Winter's recreant sun its span
> Has measured on the hills."

What cold icy winds, snow-laden, leap from the New Hampshire Hills across the wide valley to this sharp peak in the deep of winter, to swoop down upon the hamlet at its foot; what blinding drifts of snow rush down its slippery sides into the narrow highways; but in summer-time how hotly the blaze of August beats against its barrenness! It was not long before the mountain was covered from apex to base with a dwarf growth, and with it came the succulent blackberry. The burnt ground was a delightful feeding-place for this vine, and it grew and flourished as I never saw it grow and flourish elsewhere; and what immense berries these vines brought forth! It is not exaggerating to say they were some of them of the size of one's thumb, — and a good-sized thumb at that! I have never seen their like but once, and that was in the shadow of the old red mill at Jackson, New Hampshire.

We generally waited until the district school

had closed, and then on some bright morning with shining tin-pails we would rendezvous at the house of some neighbor for the lads and lassies, a chosen few, and when the last straggler had come in the journey was begun mountainward. We were never in a hurry, as there was much to interest by the wayside, and we felt that three miles was quite a long distance at that age.

Our way to the mountain lay over a beautiful stretch of road, a broad highway with pleasant outlooks, between many an ancient orchard and past many a quiet low-roofed farmhouse, with many a quaint and rambling characteristic, whose dwellers will point to the date upon some one of the posts in the spacious cellar, or upon some one of the stout pine rafters in the attic, as the evidence of the honorable antiquity of the roof-tree, the same being marked in durable red paint at the time of their building. They are as fully individual in their way as the scraggy apple-tree, that overhangs the turn of the carriage-way which leads one up to their hospitable doors. I never see the apple-tree but I think it the reproduction in Nature of the rugged, homely, honest settler who so many years ago blazed his way back from the sea-coast into the depths of the forest to make these inland farms for his descendants. I never see one of these old orchard-trees but I wish that I might count the rings of sap tissue that mark the building of

its fibre into the broad-armed, gnarled, low-topped tree which has ever been the close companion of New England farm civilization. To think of this homely fruit-bearer is to dream of the homely life with which it was so closely associated. I am always wondering how old they are. Their speech to me is ever of far-away days. They are full of the romance of the Past.

Just over the brow of the steep hill, that ends its long descent at the small stream which was always known as Great Brook, is a hamlet of a dozen or more houses nestled snugly together, one of which is of great age, and which was built by one of the early pioneers of the town whose ancestor broke his way into these parts when it was a wilderness entire, with only his gun, his axe, and bag of provision slung to his back. Just over the stone-wall to the left is the clean, white boulder of granite beside which he built his first camp-fire, and where he spent his first night; where a year later he built his log-cabin, and around which he began his first clearing, cutting the tall pines, burning ricks, sowing his rye, and bringing up his large family about him. He was a brave man, for I have read on the mossy tombstone that marks his resting-place this monograph, — "He was a Revolutionary soldier." The men of those days were of large, hardy manhood, and the wife was of equal womanly quality.

Across the road to the left is the old oak post which carried the well-sweep for half a dozen generations, with its sides notched for climbing. Before it was set in place a hole was bored clear through its centre, filled with salt and tightly plugged, and so it stands to-day, Sphinx-like, with its century or more of secrets locked in its gray, weather-worn body. I have passed it many a night with a quick step. It seemed a ghost of bygone days standing there alone.

Once across the threshold of some one of these farmhouses one gets glimpses, even in these broad times, of quaint home pictures, of people whose ways, like themselves, are colored with the nurture of far-off days, and to whom the outside world is much of a romance. To meet these simple-minded, single-hearted farm-folk by their own fireside, to sit at their humble board, to eat of their humble fare, and to bask in the glow of their blazing, old-fashioned hearth, is a rare pleasure in this selfish, hurrying world. It is an experience full of charm, and not without its lessons to the wordling. They are the wildflowers of humanity in all their purity of guise and perfume, and not less attractive in their homely setting. Their lintels, like those of the old Hebrew dwellers in Egypt in the days of Moses, know no pestilence of dishonesty and falsehood, no unrest of insatiable desire or oppressions of heartless men. The tides

that surge so tumultuously up and down the highways where men push for a chance in the world's lottery pass over these homes with silent footsteps.

Clinging devoutly to the traditions of earlier days, they read of railroads, of telegraphs, and telephones, of great cities with their immense populations, their boundless wealth and wickedness, not the less thankful for the comfort and privacy of the snug farmhouse, its simple wants, its homely thrift, and its nearness to Nature. Farm people are Nature's children, only they are gifted with intellect. Nature has no more devout admirers. They go to Nature's school every day, and Nature paints for them many a beautiful picture of spring-time sowing and of jocund summer, of fragrant mowing-fields and brown harvestings; many a picture of sun and storm, of clearing skies and ruddy sunsets. The alchemy of Nature teaches them many a secret the world would like to know of insect habit, of bird life, and woodland lore. Not every tiller of the soil is a lout or bumpkin, but far from it, nor is farm life all of toil. It has the rich compensation of pastoral beauty and simplicity which lends to its living an indescribable charm.

A few years hence, and the old ways will have been obliterated. The ample fireplaces will have been "bricked up," and the time-honored crane

will have found its way into the cart of the old-junk man. Its associations will have grown to the dignity of legends such as Hawthorne tells to children in his "Tanglewood Tales." This smooth turnpike of to-day offers no suggestion of the times when it was but a narrow trail through the thick woods, a horse-path over which the settler, following the backbone or spine of the ridge, went to mill with his corn and barley grist. In those days the grist-mill was often miles away, and to reach it was a tedious undertaking. It was a day's journey

"To go and another to come."

The rude church upon the hill which overlooked an unbroken sea of forest was reached in like manner, goodman and dame riding the same steed; for many a year of backwoods life elapsed before the lumbering, springless wagon was used by even the more well-to-do farmer. A light Brewster has just passed me along this self-same road of boyhood, leaving behind its white line of slow-settling dust as it disappears over the knoll by the old well-sweep. The heavy thoroughbrace was good enough for sensible folk in those days when lumber was cheap and plenty. Those were solid times of good stout cow-hide boots for the girls, and of leathern bags for the grist, — days of good digestions, of devout and respectful and

respectable manners, when the school children always doffed cap and bonnet with marked deference to pastor and teacher, when things were made to last

"A hundred years to a day;"

and so they have lasted, clock, spinning-wheel, and loom, to the great gratification of many people who once had ancestors. As for the people who never had any ancestry, an old clock in the hallway or a flax-wheel in the parlor stands for something; if they are not heirlooms, their possession shows extremely good taste. I think it a good sign that so much interest should be taken in these relics and homely reminders of "ye olden times" when our granddams spun, knit, and wove the apparel for the household. They at least afford lively suggestion to the race of dawdlers.

I very much doubt if anybody with Yankee blood in his veins can ever become the society dawdler our novelists are so fond of serving up in black and white for the delectation of their pessimist readers, — such as Howells and James so aptly sketch with a free hand; but I have an impression that a six months' apprenticeship to farm-life would eradicate the disease even in its worst stages. I am a believer in the Antæan theory, that men gain strength by their contact with the earth. Dirt is a great healer, a

great health-giver, as many a child knows as he recalls his pie-making days. It is the base of any great democracy and an admirable leveller of class distinctions. This repugnance on the part of some people to own their plebeian ancestry is a human weakness which honest people despise and avoid; for if there is anything of which an American ought to be proud it is his democratic descent, his plebeian independence. One's forefathers may not have been voyagers in the Mayflower, or have stood among the "embattled farmers" of Concord, or have had a hand in the drafting of the Constitution; but I have no doubt that in some humble way they served the common cause. It is enough to be of American birth in these days of growing civilization.

The outlook from this knoll shows many a broad rood of orchard and sloping farm-land, with the quiet, elm-shadowed hamlet just below, the gray roofs and red chimneys of which show through the broken masses of scarlet maple and yellowing elm with kindly greeting. Past the grocery, with its sagging ridgepole and its post-office sign, with its insignia of weather-worn antiquity, and farther down the long hill, is a group of rustic road-builders with ploughs, carts, and oxen. Road-building in the country is a simple matter. The expenditure is a limited one, and there are no rapacious aldermen, no committees on streets, to be approached with delicacy.

Haying is over; the uplands were shorn of their blossoms a month ago, and the fragrance of the meadows has been stowed away upon the barn-scaffolding for winter tid-bits for the cows and calves; and how eagerly will they reach out for the juicy blue-joint and herdsgrass as the farmer pushes the meadow-grass by their noses along the barn floor! What sweet breaths these coaxing cattle have as they stretch their necks over the low rail in mute appeal. But how eloquent was that appeal! I could never refuse it, and what good friends we were in those days! What friendships of barnyard and pasture-side we made as the huge forkfuls of yellow straw and corn-butts went out of the barn into its narrow, sunny yard, and under its sheds for the cattle to munch while they took their daily airing in the snowy, blustering winter weather. How warmly the midday sun shone out of the south when the melted snow along the roof of the barn came dripping down, hardening into long, shapely icicles as the afternoon grew, cooler, grayer, and shorter with the sundown!

But our farmer has turned road-builder, and has begun his fall instalment of tax-paying labor upon the highways. Country highways are ever characteristic of the road-surveyor regnant. They abound in human traits, rough, hubbly, and full of inequalities, or smooth and well-ballasted, like the men who build them. Woe to the traveller's

comfort when the road-surveyor is a man with a hobby! He will invariably plough up the best bit of road in his district, if only to demonstrate his incapacity and the inutility of his ideas. All taxes are come to be grievous and irksome since the days of the Boston Tea Party, but of all such levyings the road-tax arouses least of adverse criticism. In many road-districts this working out of the highway tax is a mere form or semblance of labor, — a sort of animated loafing for three or four days, when the obligation is well cancelled on the surveyor's book, — so much for oxen, so much for cart and ploughs, and so much for man. These are notable days in the farm calendar, the only days in the year when a boy's work commands a man's pay. It is more often a farce than a conscientious effort.

What a still day, and yet what a fresh, bright atmosphere lies over the hills! The birds scour the roadsides before us in troops, — sparrows, robins, now and then a stray sap-sucker or crimson crested woodpecker, with hosts of thistle-birds to keep them company. The noisy chatter and song of the earlier summer-time are hushed and subdued. The road-builders accost us as we pass them, no doubt thinking all the time of their own childhood and its barrenness. These fields were young and of smaller area when they were boys, when there was less of romping and more of denial;

but how stoutly the oxen pull the great breaking-up plough through the solid road as the furrow breaks crumbling from its burnished share! Some of the larger boys, who are levelling the dirt with their shining hoe-blades, look after us with wistful glance as we scamper down the hill to the bridge, chasing the birds that lead us with swift wing, diving into the shadows of the birches or exploring the depths of the hardhack, which is still in bloom; and what perfectly formed spikes of pink color they flaunt above the walls! The roadside blooms all the summer long. The swamp-roses, or, as we used to call them, the pond-roses, are abundant, overtopping the tallest rails of the fences. A spray of golden-rod throws its brightness against the ripening foliage of the hedge; and what a sharp contrast of lively yellow it makes! The buttercups and white ox-eyes linger in the shadows of the trees and of the pine woods, where a drumming partridge is beating the long-roll with his wings, and with its murmuring sound comes the singing of the waters of Great Brook, — always the great trouting-stream of the section.

Most of the streams back among the hills get low in midsummer, and though they are shrunken, many of them, into mere runlets, yet to me they sing as merrily in their poverty as when the melting snows and fall rains have swollen them to the tops of their banks, when everything goes by you

with a rush and a tumultuous roar. But Great Brook is the natural outlet of the broad basin, known far and wide as College Swamp, — an unfamiliar place to most people, a dense wilderness, in fact, where only an enthusiastic angler would think of going, and its waters do not suffer much diminution except in drouth. I think the rippling shallows in the hot days of August far more musical than the turbid currents of the earlier springtime. Looking from the crooked hemlock rail at the side of the bridge, down upon the stony pathway of this stream, brown and smooth or covered with dark-hued mosses trailing with the limpid waters that go pattering down the narrow lanes between the glistening boulders, shooting across the white, slippery ledges with broad rushing footsteps as they hurry past the broken slopes of Greenleaf's pasture, one wonders if there is much difference between this brook and the one which ran by

"Philip's farm, where brook and river meet."

I feel that my brook is not the less beautiful, and I apprehend that its song is much the same as that one which Tennyson so beautifully translates:

"I chatter over stony ways
In little sharps and trebles,
I bubble into eddying bays,
I babble on the pebbles.

"With many a curve my banks I fret
By many a field and fallow,
And many a fairy foreland set
With willow-weed and mallow.

"I chatter, chatter as I flow
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever.

"I wind about and in and out,
With here a blossom sailing,
And here and there a lusty trout,
And here and there a grayling.

"And here and there a foamy flake
Upon me as I travel,
With many a silvery waterbreak
Above the golden gravel.

"And draw them all along, and flow
To join the brimming river,
For men may come and men may go,
But I go on forever."

Instead of willow-weed and mallow, here are thick-growing margins of white, feathery alder, and mid-stream are stately clusters of the cardinal-flower, bright like bits of bursting flame; among the more sober hues of the unkempt pasture is the delicately colored iris, and for the grayling are the silvery chub and the shimmering scales of the voracious pickerel. Beside the brook are square

rods of the bright green Indian-poke, and in the moist places the yellow flower of the tall-stalked elecampane looks down upon its more humble brother, with more of pity than disdain as it seems to me.

II.

THIS valley seems very narrow when the mists shut down over the wood, barring out the farm-house up the road a bit, but the atmosphere is dry, and there are no damp, drizzling fogs from the sea to blur the beautiful picture of the wood and sky. What temptations lie in these sparkling waters, and yielding to them, we, childlike, have left the highway, and with shoes and stockings high and dry on the bank, are soon wading about the brook with all the abandon of childhood. I have no doubt had Birket Foster set eyes upon us, he would have made that day immortal to us, so far as his art could have lent its aid. The world of sky, of teeming earth, seemed to be perfection. I do not think a shadow of a thought came across our minds other than that we were to get home with the nightfall. How few have been such days since we have grown larger in years and stature, but the compensation of these later years is an untold one in its wealth of friendships and increased

intelligence, its broad outlooks, and in its consummations.

Opposite the scene of our wayside frolic was a steep bank of reddish-colored clay-and-loam mixture, and a few inches below its grass top were numerous round holes all arow, the homes of the sand-martins or bank-swallows. There are plenty of martins, and they are continually dodging in and out these tiny doorways; and what swift-winged fellows, as they circle about us, keeping up a constant whistling, their purplish coats glistening in the sun! One by one they fly into these holes, and not a sand-martin is in sight; a few moments later, and all are out again scouring the tops of the bushes up and down stream, chasing such insects as attract their attention. The nests of these birds are the safest from depredation of any that I know. They are curious structures, these nests in the meadow-banks by the brooks, for this outer entrance leads oftentimes by a winding gallery of considerable length to, as Dr. Brewer says, "a small spherical apartment, on the floor of which they form a rude nest of straw and feathers." They are but another illustration of the rare intelligence with which God has endowed many of his creatures.

Just below the turn in the brook is "Tinker's Dam," an antiquated and much dilapidated wooden flume which was erected years ago, when men had

the mania for building saw-mills. It went by the name of "Thurston's Folly" for years, and was a mark for many a rustic witticism. There was hardly a stream in the town which had not a mill of some sort, the shingle-mill being most in vogue, and a third of the year was the most they could be utilized; but shingles must be had, and at those seasons of the year when water was plenty there was not much else to do, so it came about that this flume was set and a dam begun which was never finished. What glorious visions once floated through the brain of its projector of whirring mill-wheels, of busy, thriving hives of industry, and of inrolling wealth! what dreams of restless trade and thronging crowds had peopled this hollow in the woods none knew but himself. The dam was never completed, but ever since then the water has poured through its flume in drouth and freshet in noisy contempt of this nondescript enterprise. The old shingle-mill which once stood above the bridge, the rotten timbers of which strew the pasture-side, had sawed many a thousand of pumpkin-pine shingles for primitive house and barn, but when it had outlived its usefulness it was given over to decay. The old mill is gone, but the "Folly" remains.

There is a great deal of human nature invested in these silent landmarks of events. This old tumble-down flume has taught many a passer by,

who knew its story, a worthy and no doubt lasting lesson. It is one of the unlettered sign-boards, the like of which exists doubtless in many a country town whose traditions reach back to the beginning of the present century.

But leaving the rollicking brook with its alders, its flaming cardinal-blossoms, its swallows and its "devil's-darning-needles," dragon-flies, hovering motionless over the brown shallows, and donning our shoes, we trudge up the steep hill which forms the outer lower base of Porcupine. The sun is well up, and the mulleins by the road look dry and tired of holding their yellow flowers so straightly and stiffly up; but with a drink from the watering-trough under the apple-trees we keep straight up the highway to the mountain. The higher up we get the more abundant the indications of the blackberry, high-bush as well as creeper.

The two species common to Maine hillsides are the *Rubus villosus*, or the high-bush, and the *R. Canadensis*, or running blackberry. This creeper is abundant among the rocks by the side of the highway. It is a dear lover of sunshine. Flowering in June, it covers the ground with its patches of snow-white color, almost odorless, though so beautiful. When a boy how eagerly I watched the slow transformation of these blossoms into fruitage as I trudged to the brick school-house, and as I went to the pasture for the cows through

the midsummer. Just below the farmhouse, halfway to the pasture-bars, and just within the afternoon shadows of a dwarf pine, was a tangle of these vagabondish vines ; and what savage, needle-pointed spines grew along their slender lengths, and how they stung me as I robbed them of their dainty treasure ! This species was well scattered about the farm along the hedges, romping in the sunshine over the ledges among the spiderwort and leatherleaf, clambering over the fences and stumps, not disdaining the company of the purple pigeon-berry and the high-bush blueberry. These vines take on charming colors of purple, scarlet, and bronze as the summer advances, and their favorite haunts about the old home-place were along an ancient half-wall topped off with a half-rail fence, — two pine rails rived and set into mortised posts, and which bounded the ten-acre lot just above the county road. These pine rails had grown gray with age, and were covered here and there with shields of vari-colored lichens, the most beautiful of which were the *Parmelia pallescens*. This fence was the rendezvous of the robins and yellow-birds, and in cherry-time, of the cedar or cherry-birds as well, where they held their morning and afternoon assemblies, discussing matters with many a musical note. Flanking the upper edge of the half-wall, and along its margin at irregular intervals, were clumps of chokecherry,

dwarf puckery fruit-bearers, an oak sapling or two, and nearer the house, growing in the throat of this rambling line of cobble-stone, was a huge black cherry-tree that hung full of luscious fruit in August; and it was just beyond its western shadow that I used to find the *R. Canadensis* in its perfection. These vines bore a large black, juicy fruit, and many a platter heaped with their dusky pulpiness found its way to the tea-table for the men as they came in from their work. How refreshing the coolness of these first blackberries of the season on a hot August afternoon, as they were brought up from the cool, breezy cellar-way; but I found much of interest about this old wall besides running vines. I never saw anywhere else such huge caterpillar-nests as infested the tops of the bushes of the chokecherry. Some of them were nearly a yard across, and very much like bits of muslin they looked at a distance hung out to dry in the sun; but they were doomed to annihilation. With the falling dew, these pests seek their nests, when, with coils of birch-bark three or four feet in length, with one end well ignited and blazing brightly, we went about the farm destroying every nest that we knew of. When the nests were in the tops of the trees we thrust a long stick or pole into our coil of bark and thus hoisted our torches into the tops of the tallest limbs. Sometimes we made quite a torch-

light procession in the orchard going from one tree to another.

Along these half-sunken stones I found always beautiful lichens. Over some of the larger stones in the wall were fine specimens of the *P. pallescens*, light-hued, with different shades of olive and gray, and with more or less of rufous tint, — as beautiful as a flower, and as wonderfully made. Here is a bit of rotten limb which the wind has torn from the tall cherry-tree and thrown down into the damp shadow of the hedge. On its rough bark I find some specimens of the *Claydonia pyxidata*, and which grew, some of them, nearly an inch in height, with all their cup-shaped blossoms right side up to catch the stray dewdrops as they fall from the dripping leaves above them. In the moist hollows of this hedge, where the shadows lie deepest through the day, I frequently came across some very dainty specimens of the toad-stool, their tops wide-spread, umbrella-like; and what thick, dainty-like ribs stretch outward from its slender stem! I find some very large ones occasionally in the woods. A toad might keep his back well dry under one of them in a shower, spreading as they do some four or five inches across. I have often wondered where they got their delicate stainings of scarlet, which I have noticed so frequently marking their creamy tinted tops. It may be owing to some delicious beverage of the

field or woods, the secret of which is withheld from their admirers; but what topers they are along with the lichens, what hard drinkers from every rain!

But we have already mounted the easterly shoulder of the Porcupine, and looking back can see the steep slopes which make the sides of the Great Brook Valley. Above the valley lies the ancient tree-embowered hamlet, and farther on is the lofty ridge of farming lands where runs the gray line of this half-wall of which I have been writing, with its thick hedge and wide, massy-topped cherry-tree, and just below, under the shadow of the elms, is the red-clapboarded side of the farmhouse peering through the dark-green foliage of the orchard-trees. Far away beyond all this stretches the valley seaward. How distinctly these objects answer the questioning of the vision, and how intimately do I know them every one.

The *R. villosus* begins to greet us from the nooks and corners of the fences, but there is no delaying on our part, for we know they reach their greatest abundance and highest perfection among the fastnesses of the hills, and along the rugged slopes of Porcupine especially. We keep sharp watch to the left for the old-time corduroy logging-road, which will take us comfortably over the swamp, which has pre-empted a good bit of acreage along the verge of this lower outwork of the mountain,

and once well into this wood-road we find a renewed exhilaration in the coolness of its shadows. How friendly-like the trees reach out their branches toward us with greeting of twig and leaf. The yellow birch, the beech, hemlock, and spruce are all here. Here is more poke-weed, and not far from it is a large cluster of flowering thoroughwort, its blossoms pure white, tinged with yellow slightly, which I have marked for my own on the return homeward. A decoction of thoroughwort and well-seasoned cider, fresh from the best barrel in the amply stored cellar, was the regulation spring drink of the farm household in those days. It was the appetite-builder of the season; and plucking thoroughwort, like cutting hog-yokes, was to be done whenever and wherever we found it in bloom. We have found the Finch family and the warblers at home, and they make a continual concert among the evergreen tops.

I discover a sound as of the humming of a swarm of bees. As I lag behind the humming grows louder, and sounds close by, as if there might be a stolen nest in some of these aged yellow birches that lean out over the path. It is the song of the honey-bee, for I have discovered several of them about the blossoms of the big-leaved moosewood. I say nothing to my comrades, but later in the season I will see what this noise means. With a bit of shingle, some honey or brown sugar, I will

make these rovers among the autumn blossoms tell me where their home is. Along this moist land is a luxuriant undergrowth among the taller spruces and deciduous trees. The ground is overrun with snake-berry, partridge-plum, and hosts of other creepers, all carrying dark-green, waxy-looking leaves. One of these woodland vines bears a leaf the markings of which are much like those of the adder-snake. It is not common, though I have seen it in the Peabody valley when following its streams downward to the main tributary of the Androscoggin.

When in the swamps I am always peering about to escape contact with the dogwood bush, some species of which are very poisonous. The itching, burning sensations of this poison at work on the hands or face are similar to those induced by the wax-leaved mercury, or poison ivy of the meadows and uplands. This species of ivy grows rankest in the swamps, but it delights as well in rambling lengths of tumble-down wall, often throwing its tendrils about some adjacent tree, its robust leaf looking out at you from its perch with blood-shot, baleful glance or with the glistening green eyes of some venomous reptile! Contact with this vine is something to be dreaded by those to whom its touch is so malignant. When a child there was nothing in nature so dreaded by me as this vine. Not even the dirty-looking adder of the ledges,

with his mottled markings of milk-white and drab, lying across my pathway in the field would arouse in me such feeling of revulsion, as this crimson-stemmed climber, the *Rhus toxicodendron* of the country-side. In some sections of New England it is not found as abundantly as in others.

By a curious freak of favor it withholds its malignancy from some, while to others it shows its invisible fangs at every turn. I ever gave the meadow haymow a wide berth in winter-time, as this vine stores its virus in the withered leaf with unabated power. Each leaf seems to be a storage battery of noxious vegetable matter. There was a patch of it by the old crumbling wall on the upper margin of the house-garden, and as I looked at it, passing to and from the field in childhood, it grew into one of those places which, like haunted houses, give one an indefinable sensation of chill. Had Hawthorne seen this spot of creeping vine through my eyes, he would have wrought it into the home of some mythical monster, such as that which Cadmus slew before he could build his city, whose glittering scales would have been all of burnished emerald. Here is abundance of the plant all about us. How it glares at us from the edges of the road! but one of the boys plucks one of its slimy leaves, and slowly eats it, — ugh! I thought ever after that, this boy would come to some bad end. It seemed for him to come off harmless, that

only a compact with "the Black Man" could intervene. I have noticed since that he has not got on over-well in life. Some men carry the recklessness of their boyhood into maturer years, but it seldom harms others so much as themselves. It is a characteristic that bodes but little good to its possessor or to other people.

The woods are full of sounds, of bird-note and song of hidden insect. I can hear distinctly above the other sounds the piping of the tiny red salamander, and it is very much like the note of the frog one hears in the marshes and lowlands. This little fellow sings till the frosts come, and if you are fortunate enough you will find him under some mossy rock or stump in the wet places in the woods. Mr. Burroughs details an interesting search of his for this tiny lizard. The rocks about the springs and wet runs in the forest are the favorite resorts of the Lizard family. I have spent many a half-hour turning up these wet, slippery stones to see what sort of creatures I could find beneath them. Oftentimes I would find two or three of the lizard tribe, each belonging to a different family, under the same stone; and what beautiful creeping things they were! and how graceful and agile in their movements, — the red and brown newts in particular! The most striking of all the Salamander family was that one whose coat was of shiny black, ornamented with bright

golden spots such as one finds on the *carapax* of the young tortoise in the early summer, in the muddy bottoms of the inland brooks and rivers.

How much there is to see; but emerging from this thin belt of woods, we are on the blackberry ground. In the openings among the boulders, — and how beautifully these boulders are colored! — intermingled with the stalwart high-bush, are the tall, flaming stalks of the *Hieracifolius*, the fire-weed of the burnt lands; and with every puff of wind its downy seeds go sailing down the hill-side over the tree-tops into the valley. But what cordons of vines, bending low with their dusky fruitage, hem us in! The successful gatherer of berries must needs be a silent body, and not of too restless disposition. The rover never finds the largest, juiciest fruit, but overleaps it in his haste. The pail does not fill with gadding from this to that, but rather by the aid of its owner, who knows instinctively when he is best off. We had gradually filled our pails with rounding measure, and putting them within the shadow of a clump of maples, and covering them well over with our jackets, we made the ascent to the summit of the hill; and once there, what a wealth of midsummer splendor broke upon the vision! Summer was in its full fruitage. It was too early for the hazy mists which will gild the jutting hills and woodlands a month later with their dream of golden glory. The sky is as pas-

sionless, as blue and calm, as in the flush of June, and the woods and fields are not less verdant. A cool wind blowing over the summit tempers the heat and adds to the charm. What a mosaic of Nature's making lies at my feet! There is no withholding of her picturesque bounty. The day is perfection. I have listened to many a sermon from the pulpit in which the Preacher assumed that the Deity was not able to speak for himself, but this sermon written upon the face of the earth by the Deity's own hand counted for as much with me as all that had gone before or any that have come after. Emerson translated something of the divine truth that lives throughout Nature when he wrote, "It seems as if the day were not wholly profane in which we have given heed to some natural object." Men cannot add to the teachings of Nature, to "the music and pictures of the most ancient religion." They may study her in her many moods, and tell to others what they have discovered; and yet Nature is indifferent to all they may say or do. Her laws are higher than the laws of men; and, better than mankind, her obedience is to her Creator. Her instincts are often superior to man's intelligence, and before her power man is but a pygmy. Her warnings to trespassers are always up, always legible, and the delinquent ever pays the penalty of his negligence. She is inexorable; more relentless in the enforce-

ment of her decrees than ever Draco was. She listens to no arguments; she is deaf to entreaty. Like the silent knife of the guillotine her blows fall with unexpected suddenness; but for every poison she has an antidote, but men must search it out, and the door to her laboratory is ever open. Silent, grand, and beautiful through the centuries, she is the exponent of Deity, the Universal law, the Living Force; she is the animated expression of a Divine principle, however men may choose to name it.

This picture is too broad in its composition for its beauty to be appreciated at a sweeping, single glance. I close my hands, and so look through them from one point to another; and how readily these hills and valleys, with their uplands, meadows, and woodlands, are focused into individual pictures which men try so hard to paint! What bits of perfect color! What charm of outline, of lights and shadows, of tone and crispness! Just look with me from this landmark of my childhood. It is a wonderful harmony in colors, and its nearer aspect reminds me much of Sontag, with whose pictures I became acquainted later in life, — his mountain subjects, so ragged and unkempt are these huge agglomerations of rock, with their hosts of smooth, weather-worn, bark-denuded trees, their streams far down, gleaming like bits of turquoise through the openings in the trees, with their azure

depths of deepening shadow, and over all their brilliant canopy of sky. It is the same picture in parts that I have before seen from the square belfry of the old white meeting-house to the northeast, and which has for more than half a century topped the rounded dome of its swelling ridge of farming lands, — no doubt of the same kin as this sharp peak upon which the blackberries grew so luxuriantly. I well remember my sensations of wondering delight upon looking out over this boundary sea of verdure, its far-off shores losing themselves everywhere in the hazy indistinctness of horizon outline. Troops of swallows circled about the outer railing, through which the winds whistled weirdly, and I seemed to be on the very tip-top of the world; and so to my boyish eyes it seemed as I stood on the topmost crest of Porcupine. I could count a dozen lakes, half as many streams, and innumerable farms, and away to the southward what seemed to be the ocean stretched its dark-blue length along the rim of distant woods. Westward the White Hills lifted their lofty crests to the sky; wide wastes of woodland lay between, that reached around to the northward beyond the Waterford highlands, their broken slopes marked with white streaks, where the winter snows had sped downward with their avalanches of loosened rock and ice. Southward, two lengthening chains of silver narrowed out between the brown ridges, and to the

eastward, over the levels of plains-lands, beyond Thompson's Pond, hung a low trail of smoke above the iron highway from the Atlantic to the Great West. White, dusty roads, glimpses of solitary teams, of lonely farmhouses, whose isolated smokes curled slowly upward until they met the currents of the winds, of dark-foliaged orchards and bright yellow stubble-lands, of quiet hamlet, of larger village, and slender church-spire, make up the rest of this magnificent panorama of the hills.

One feels much the same way as he looks over his paper at the breakfast-table. I forgot the tediousness of the climb up Porcupine in the enchantment of scenery below and about me, so I forget the mechanical process which gives me the sentient newsmonger beside my plate, and which puts me upon the topmost pinnacle of intelligence. The outlook of my double-sheet paper is like a huge lens, the diameter of which equals that of the globe itself, and within the periphery of which is spread out the map of the world whose people speak to me in my own tongue, and over my own threshold. It is wonderful how near the stars men may live, and yet walk the earth. How the imagination comes into play, with so much of Nature's aid; for as I look, the farm-lands are covered with their primitive forests, and I can mark the trail over which the early settler of this beautiful inland town came within its borders; and what a misty

trail it is! I can see the smoke of his first camp-fire, and how lazy-like it drifts over the virgin woods.

The shrill whistle of a stray chipmunk arouses me from my dream-idyl in this wild retreat of the hills, and glancing sharply around I see him running swiftly along a fallen tree. If it were not so late in the season I should suspect him of being out on some pilfering expedition against the birds.

The squirrels have Epicurean appetites; bird's eggs and fledglings are tid-bits for which they are ever in search. From the birches below a robin whistles, "Tut-tut, tut-tut!" in a sharp, scolding tone, as if to reprove my striped neighbor for disturbing the silence of this mountain seclusion. How swiftly the midday has gone; but I am in a charmed realm. Far below, the valley skirts the base of Porcupine, where trailing down its wooded length is a low brooding mist of thinnest blue. Here and there are wide, jutting spurs and broad shelves of rock half-hidden by their leafy coverts, the eternal ledges looking lonelier and more bare, with only a scattering group of pines, wind-blown and storm-beaten, to keep them speechless company; but the pine is never speechless, never without its musical, soughing song. The stalwart pine is the monarch of the forests, but along the barren slopes and rocky mountain-sides it becomes the sentinel tree, the guardian-spirit personified.

But what slow change is this that has come over the sky with the waning afternoon! Its pale blue has warmed into transparent amber; white, massy cumuli are filling the west, and the wind comes in cooler, stronger gusts. The sun is weaving shadows, with silence shod, along the margins of the woods, and in the depressions among the rocks. The landscape is growing imperceptibly gray. Its outlines grow soft, and the farther hills are slowly losing their individuality, merging into oneness, — a shimmering line of undulating horizon. The distant, low-down tops of the woods look like the far-off sea, blue, level, and boundless; and beyond all, the narrow streak of ochre-stained sky has the semblance of a bar of gleaming sand. From behind the western mountains, —

"Sinuous southward and sinuous northward the shimmering band
Of the sand-beach fastens the fringe of the marsh to the folds of the land.
Inward and outward, to northward and southward, the beach lines linger and curl,
As a silver wrought garment that clings to and follows the firm, sweet lines of a girl.
Vanishing, swerving, evermore curving again into sight,
Softly the sand-beach wavers away to a dim, gray looping of light."

It is not difficult to conjure the early rising mists into the sails of phantom vessels as they follow the trail of the river up its hidden slopes to meet the

cool breeze that is to build them into the crimson clouds of sunset. There is a fleet of these phantom sails coming up from the south that have left the sea hours ago, and how leisurely they drift over the emerald floors of the illimitable woods.

Little by little the silence is lost. The tree-toad has found his way up here among these decaying stumps, and has opened his mouth for a trill, as his house gets out of the line of the sun and into the shadow. A red-crested woodpecker has begun his tattoo upon one of the tall dead trees below me, and among their undergrowth the dwarf maples and wild-cherry, — the beautiful sumac being in like abundance, — I hear the soft twittering of the song-sparrow, and my robin has begun his ringing notes, — the overshot threads of sound in this medley web of music. Along the highway, far down the hill, some one is singing a stanza from an old hymn. I catch the last two lines, —

> "He plants his footsteps in the sea,
> And rides upon the storm."

How clearly these sounds climb the steeps of the mountain, and with them I hear the noisy rattle of wheels over the stony ruts and outcropping ledges of this road; but it is time to think of home-going. Down through the yellow brakes, through thick tangles of fallen tree-top and flaunting fireweed, breaking many a silvery, invisible barrier of spider's subtile weaving stretched across

our way, leaping, slipping, and tumbling over one obstacle after another, we go to our pails, which we find undisturbed, and are soon in the logging-road. My honey-bees are silent, but my blossoming thoroughwort is not forgotten, and I have plucked it on my way to the road. What tired, hungry children we were, and how prosaic the highway after the outlook of the mountain! What appetites were ours in those days, when every wind that blew brought its fill of zest! Our progress homeward is a silent trudge, but the pictures of those blackberrying days can never be forgotten; and what golden treasures they are! What halcyon thoughts does the aforetime country urchin cherish of birds in air, of flowering uplands and meadow brooks, of breezy hill-tops, of smoking ricks and fragrant clover-swaths new-mown, of June, and of October woods with their yellow mists, of hooded Indian summer and bare November, gray with lowering skies and spitting snows, and of homely country by-ways. Life is the better, purer, and more hopeful for every boyish tramp of ours.

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